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WAS SHE A CHARLATAN?

A Critical Analysis
of the 1885 Report

OF THE

Society for Psychical Research

on the Phenomena connected with

Mme. H. P. BLAVATSKY

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BY

WILLIAM KINGSLAND

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THE BLAVATSKY ASSOCIATION

26, BEDFORD GARDENS, W.8

THE BLAVATSKY ASSOCIATION

THIS ASSOCIATION has for its object to perpetuate the Memory and Work of H. P. BLAVATSKY, the Originator of the Theosophical Movement, to promulgate her teachings, and defend her name and reputation.

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PREFACE

HAVE been asked by the Council of the BLAVATSKY ASSOCIATION to write for them a concise analysis of the 1885 Report of the Society for Psychical Research "on the phenomena connected with the Theosophical Society"—otherwise, the phenomena associated with the personality of Mme. H. P. Blavatsky.

I have undertaken to do this with great reluctance and distaste—but nevertheless with a somewhat strong inner urge—for several reasons. In the first place, the Report is now practically out of date, and it seems rather late in the day to write about it at all ; so much has happened since then in the spread of the Theosophical Movement which Mme. Blavatsky inaugurated that the conclusions of the Report, and the prophecies which the Committee who drew it up ventured to make, are already falsified ; whilst psychical research has itself made such progress as to place the phenomena on a much more credible basis to-day than was the case forty years ago.

At the time the Report was issued Mme. Blavatsky had not written *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Key to Theosophy*, or *The Voice of the Silence*. Moreover, we have recently come into possession of a large volume of *The Letters of the Mahatmas to A. P. Sinnett*, and also the letters of Mme. Blavatsky herself to Mr. Sinnett. These throw a flood of light upon many incidents which were previously obscure.

In the second place, the Report has only an indirect bearing on the *teachings* of Theosophy : these teachings being what I was in the first instance—and am to the last—interested in ; the phenomena, and even the personality of the teacher being to me at that time of quite secondary importance ; as, indeed, they must necessarily be to-day for all those whose lives have been so profoundly influenced by these teachings, and who did not know Mme. Blavatsky personally. Moreover, as Mahatma M' says in one of his letters to A. P. Sinnett (p. 262) : " If our philosophy is wrong a *wonder* will not set it right." And we might paraphrase this and say : If the philosophy is right, a *bogus* wonder will not make it wrong.

The S.P.R. Report cannot to-day—nor indeed did it at that time—make any difference to those for whom *Theosophy*, the *Ancient Wisdom Religion*, has been the great TRUTH which has not

merely presented the only rational solution of the more intellectual problems of life, but which has also appealed to their deeper intuitions in a strange, mysterious manner, as if it were the recovery of a knowledge attained in far back incarnations, and now happily once more discovered.

In the third place, the H. P. Blavatsky whom I knew personally was certainly not the "accomplished impostor" presented to us in the S.P.R. Report ; and I was absolutely unacquainted with the Mme. Blavatsky presented to us in Solovyoff's book, *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, to which I shall make a short reference later on, since the S.P.R. saw fit, ten years after their own Report was issued, to endeavour to bolster up their case by sponsoring Solovyoff's book : their Report by itself having entirely failed to bring about the collapse of the Theosophical Movement.

If such a personality as is presented in these two documents ever existed, she must have utterly vanished by the time I came to know the author of *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Voice of the Silence*, etc.

Nevertheless, the Report and the book are even now sometimes quoted as having definitely *proved* that the psychic phenomena associated with Mme. Blavatsky were entirely fraudulent ; and also that the Masters or Mahatmas from whom she claimed to have received her teachings were her own invention, and do not, in fact, exist.

I shall show that the Report does not *prove* by any evidence that would be accepted in a court of law either the one or other of these assumptions. As for Solovyoff's book—that shall speak for itself later on.

I have found, on making a close analysis of the Report for the purpose of this monograph, that there are several vital discrepancies in it which previous critics on behalf of Mme. Blavatsky appear to have overlooked ; and it may be as well for the sake of posterity, as also for our present purpose, since Mme. Blavatsky will undoubtedly be for posterity one of the most notable characters of the nineteenth century—"the sphinx of the nineteenth century"—to place on record in a concise form a critical survey of this damnatory Report. The only other concise criticism at present available is that of Mrs. Annie Besant, published in 1907 under the title of *H. P. Blavatsky and the Masters of the Wisdom*. The replies which were made to the Report at the time it was published are more or less scattered in books and magazines.

The attacks which are made to-day on the character and work of the founder of the Theosophical Movement emanate principally from so-called 'Christian' and 'Spiritualistic' sources; it is seldom that the teachings themselves are impugned. It is apparently thought by these detractors that if they only throw sufficient mud at the woman who gave the teachings to the world they are thereby amply discrediting the teachings themselves. But if any one wishes to prove that Shakespeare wrote bad plays, or Wagner bad music, he surely does not do so by endeavouring to prove that the one was once a poacher and the other an immoral man.

I have often been aghast at the freedom with which some of these detractors, even so-called 'dignitaries' of the Church, have hesitated to slander and vilify a dead woman by repeating statements which have been amply refuted over and over again, and which in any case the recognized code of decent respect for the dead—not to mention the Karmic Law, "judge not that ye be not judged", and, for all those who call themselves Christians—all events, the precepts and example of Jesus Christ Himself—would have prevented them from doing. When these detractors have been challenged to show—apart from the promulgation of the teachings which they dislike—what *evil* Mme. Blavatsky has done, they have been silent.

My own association with Mme. Blavatsky commenced in 1888, after the S.P.R. Report had been published nearly three years. She was then permanently settled in London—the headquarters of the enemy—and had gathered round her a devoted and highly intellectual group of workers in the cause of Theosophy. I never saw her perform any phenomena, nor did I ever ask her to perform any. I did not see how any of the phenomena she was reputed to have performed could be any evidence of the truth of the teachings, though they might possibly have gone to strengthen the existence of the Masters, as also the fact that every individual possesses unknown and undeveloped psychic faculties and powers. This, as I have said above, has since been amply proved by psychical research itself. I did consider, however, in spite of the S.P.R. Report, that her phenomenal powers had been fully testified by a very large number of credible witnesses. I naturally held in reserve a great many conclusions when I first made her acquaintance; but I have never seen any reason to go back on my first favourable impressions; and I have since then adopted the philosophy which I learnt from her the basis of all my literary work during the last thirty-five years.

For the purpose of this monograph I have made a much closer study and analysis of the S.P.R. Report than I had previously done. I not merely find nothing therein to modify my previous conclusions, but more and more as I have proceeded with that analysis I have perceived that the Report is a colossal example of *suppressio veri, suggestio falsi*.

The Report is drawn up with such a plausible appearance of exhaustive investigation that it is difficult for those who have not a more extended knowledge of the facts than is presented therein to recognize the specious nature of the 'evidence' put forward, and how much has really been suppressed. But I do not see how any one can make a really critical study of it without recognizing the fact that it is simply a brief for the prosecution. The history of our law courts is full of cases which show how easily a prosecution can twist circumstances and events into an apparently damning indictment.

But even further than that, the Committee of the S.P.R. closed the case after receiving Mr. Hodgson's Report of his visit to India ; in other words, the Committee closed the case after hearing the speech of the counsel for the prosecution. On page 205 they say : " After examining Mr. Hodgson's Report of the results of his personal inquiries, they are of opinion that the testimony to these marvels is in no case sufficient, taking amount and character together, to resist the force of the general presumption above mentioned." This 'presumption' was : " That all the marvellous narratives put forward as evidence of the existence and occult power of the Mahatmas are to be explained as due either (a) to deliberate deception carried out by or at the instigation of Madame Blavatsky, or (b) to spontaneous illusion, or hallucination, or unconscious misrepresentation or invention on the part of the witnesses."

Well, if they had stopped there, and had left every one to form their own opinion from the Report, there might have been less to be said. But as a matter of fact they go far beyond this in the last paragraph of their statement, and definitely brand Mme. Blavatsky as an impostor. Moreover, they never gave her or any one else a chance of seeing the Report and replying to it before they published it. They did not even submit to the defence the alleged forged letters from Mme. Blavatsky to Mme. Coulomb on which so much of their 'evidence' rests. What would be thought of such a procedure in a court of law ?

A detailed analysis of the Report would fill a large volume and certainly would not be read to any extent ; nor do I suppose

one moment that it would serve to convince those who do wish to be convinced. I shall therefore confine myself in this monograph to showing as concisely as possible, in the first place, that the Report *proves* nothing by any evidence that would be accepted in a court of law; and that in fact it is simply a mass of conjectures and theories, in many cases too absurd to be considered for a moment; and in the second place I shall show even if fraud could be said to have been proved in one or two instances, the sweeping inferences which are drawn therefrom are far beyond their legitimate bearing, and do not in any case justify the great work which Mme. Blavatsky accomplished in the literature which she gave to the world in *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Key to Theosophy*, and *The Voice of the Silence*. It is by that literature and its gradual acceptance as a fresh inflow of spiritual teaching at a time when the world was drifting into materialism, and not by the S.P.R. Report, that H. P. Blavatsky will be judged by posterity. **FALSE** And though for a long time to come there must necessarily be many who cannot accept the teachings contained in her works, and who will doubtless continue to denounce these teachings because they may appear to run counter to their own religious or other prejudices, yet I may perhaps hope that this analysis will do something to check the reckless use of the S.P.R. Report as if it were an infallible document. I trust also that it will help to dissociate entirely the phenomenal and merely personal aspects of Mme. Blavatsky's life from the teachings and literary work which she gave to the world, and which will most assuredly as time goes on place her name amongst those of the world's great teachers and bringers.

If, as is most probable, when all is said and done, those who refuse to accept the conclusions of the S.P.R. Report will still continue to do so, then we must say to them: Very well, you are still to account for the greatest of all the phenomena, the production by this same woman whom you denounce as a fraud and a charlatan of the literature I have named; and more particularly the production by a broken-down worn-out woman, who was thought physically to have died years previously, of that great work *The Secret Doctrine*. This was perhaps the greatest wonder in the life of this wonderful woman. We have it on indisputable evidence that she was at least three times restored to life when practically dead, by the direct presence and action of the Master. This, and her own indomitable will to write *The Secret Doctrine*, and to carry her work through to the farthest

possible point before giving in, kept her not merely alive, but at her desk from morning to night in spite of a continuous physical martyrdom. You have either to solve the psychological problem as to how Mme. Blavatsky the 'charlatan' could be the same *person* as the Mme. Blavatsky who wrote that work, or else you must fall back upon some double personality theory, and acknowledge that there is no connexion whatever between the one person and the other ; between the phenomena which you say were fraudulent, and which the Society for Psychical Research did *not* witness, and the greater phenomenon of *The Secret Doctrine* which stands visibly before your eyes.

But there is possibly even a greater difficulty than that for critics and detractors to solve. How is it that notwithstanding the S.P.R. Report Mme. Blavatsky was able to settle in London, and to gather round her a devoted band of men and women of character, of public standing, and scholarly and literary ability ?

Perhaps the best answer of all to anything that can be said or written in reply to the S.P.R. Report is the symposium issued soon after Mme. Blavatsky's death in 1891, and entitled *In Memory of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, by Some of Her Pupils*. There are twenty-three personal records in that book, besides other matter to which one can pass from the S.P.R. Report and Solovyoff's book as one might pass after stumbling in the darkness of a primeval forest through slimy bogs into brilliant sunshine, and find one's feet on firm ground.

I can only instance two cases from this symposium, since they bear directly upon the question of the validity of the S.P.R. Report. These two cases are those of Mrs. Annie Besant and Mr. Herbert Burrows. It is well known that these two were closely associated in Socialistic work and agnostic propaganda. To join the Theosophical Society, as they did together in 1889, was practically to turn their backs on all their past efforts and their present associates. Yet they took the step *because of the teachings*. This is what Mr. Burrows says of his early impressions of H. P. Blavatsky :

"I caught glimpses of a lofty morality, of a self-sacrificing zeal, of a coherent philosophy of life, of a clear and definite science of man and his relations to a spiritual universe. These it was which attracted me—not phenomena, for I saw none. . . . Quickly I learned that the so-called charlatan and trickster was a noble soul."

Well, before Mme. Blavatsky would accept these two ^{as}

members of the Theosophical Society she told them to go and read the S.P.R. Report. This is what Mr. Burrows says of this in another place (*Isis Very Much Unveiled*, p. 81) :

"We read it separately, analysed it—and joined. I brought to it Civil Service training, what business faculties I had, and a fair knowledge of the laws of evidence. I am a sceptic by nature, and I was then a materialist, and the honest conclusion that I came to was that the case for the prosecution was far too weak to warrant a conviction. That opinion I still hold. I suppose that nine out of ten people who talk glibly about the Report have never seen even the first pages of it."

I may add to the above one more testimony, a quite recent one. Mr. G. R. S. Mead, the well-known scholar, and for seven years editor of *The Quest Quarterly Review*, was intimately associated with Mme. Blavatsky during the last three years of her life, having given up his profession of teaching to work with her. This is what he says in *The Quest*, April 1926 :

"Whatever else Yelena Petrovna was . . . she was not, within my experience at any rate, the vulgar trickster and charlatan of the popular legend. I do not of course know what happened when she was not there ; but then nearly all of her accusers are equally in the same boat."

I wish to add here that all that I am saying in this analysis does not discredit the S.P.R. Report does *not* mean that I unhesitatingly accept each and all of the phenomena dealt with in that Report as having actually occurred as testified by those who witnessed them. I am no more in a position to prove that they *did* than Hodgson was to prove that they *did not* ; and as I have said before, I do not really concern myself as to whether they did or did not.

THE REPORT: INTRODUCTORY

The following is quoted from the *Proceedings* of the Society Part IX, December 1885, p. 201 ff. This number of the *Proceedings* also contains the full Report made by Mr. Richard Hodgson after his visit to India, November 1884 to April 1885, and which is mainly the subject of the criticism contained in the following pages :

" In May 1884 the Council of the Society for Psychical Research appointed a Committee for the purpose of taking such evidence as to the alleged phenomena connected with the Theosophical Society as might be offered by members of that body at the time in England, or as could be collected elsewhere.

" The Committee consisted of the following members, with power to add to their number : Messrs. E. Gurney, F. W. H. Myers, F. Podmore, H. Sidgwick, and J. H. Stack. They have since added Mr. R. Hodgson and Mrs. Sidgwick to their number."

After stating that the Committee had the opportunity of examining Col. Olcott and Mme. Blavatsky, as well as several other members of the Society, the Report goes on to say (p. 203) :

" In December 1884 the Committee considered that the time had come to issue a preliminary and provisional Report. . . . The conclusion then come to was expressed as follows : On the whole (though with some serious reserves) it seems undeniable that there is a *prima facie* case, for some part, at least, of the claim made, which, at the point which the investigations of the Society have now reached, cannot, with consistency, be ignored."

Accordingly, Mr. R. Hodgson was sent to India to continue the investigations. Mr. Hodgson's instructions were : in the first place to ascertain if possible the genuineness of the letters said to have been written by Mme. Blavatsky to M. and Mme. Coulomb, portions of which had been published in *The Madras Christian College Magazine* for September and October 1884 ; or whether, as stated by Mme. Blavatsky and other Theosophists, these letters were forgeries.

M. and Mme. Coulomb, it may be explained here, had previously occupied a position of trust at the head-quarters of the Theosophical Society in Bombay and Madras, but were

called in May 1884 for very substantial reasons, which will appear later on (p. 29).

In the second place, Mr. Hodgson was instructed (p. 204) :

...cross-examination and otherwise to obtain evidence which might assist the Committee in judging of the value to be attached to the testimony of some of the principal witnesses ; that he should examine the places where phenomena had occurred, with a view to ascertaining whether the explanations by trickery, that suggested themselves to the Committee, or any other such explanations, were *possible* ; and particular, as already said, that he should, as far as possible, verify the statements of the Coulombs with a view to judging whether their explanations of the phenomena were *plausible*. For it is obvious that *no value for the purpose of psychical research* can be attached to phenomena where persons like the Coulombs have been concerned, if it can be plausibly shown that they *might* themselves have produced them : at the same time, their unsupported assertion that they did produce them, cannot be taken by itself as evidence " (*Italics mine*).

With this latter paragraph I am in full agreement ; but I must remark here, in the first place, that the Report does not contain a single scrap of evidence which would be accepted in a court of law as proof that the phenomena *were actually produced* as stated by the Coulombs ; and in the second place, that there is altogether lacking in the Report any evidence that Mr. Hodgson subjected the Coulombs to the severe examination required, where persons like the Coulombs are concerned." Indeed, I may say here, and I shall show later on, that when the whole Report is boiled down and strained out there is not a single sentence, according to Mr. Hodgson, in the whole case whose evidence is worth anything *except the Coulombs* !

In quoting the above paragraph I have italicized the words 'possible', 'plausible', and 'might', for this reason : the proof that a certain explanation of a phenomenon is *possible* or *plausible* is not proof that it *did* take place in that manner. There is a difference between mere assumption and actual proof, and though we may agree that "for the purposes of psychical research" a phenomenon cannot be said to be of any evidential value when a purely physical explanation is *possible*, that is quite a different matter from branding a woman as a fraud and a charlatan on the basis of these 'possible' or 'plausible' explanations.

In this respect, therefore, the Committee went far beyond the limits of what they themselves professed to be their objective, to ascertain whether there might be 'possible' or 'plausible' explanations of the phenomena which would put them out of

court for the purpose of psychical research. The utmost verdict of the S.P.R. should have been, 'not proven'; with every one left free to form their own opinions from the Report itself and the replies which were published thereto. These replies ought in fact to have appeared with the Report. Without them it is simply a statement for the prosecution, with an endeavour to twist every incident and every witness into a pre-judged verdict. Unfortunately those who read (?) the Report, seldom if ever have the replies before them.

The pages of the Report are almost as freely besprinkled with 'if', and 'might', and 'possibly', and 'probably', etc., etc., as there are full-stops on a page.

One very general misconception about the Report which appears to prevail among those who make use of it, even in the present day, may be corrected here. It would appear from what I have already quoted from the Report itself as to its scope that neither Mr. Hodgson nor any member of the Committee witnessed the actual phenomena with which the Report deals. The phenomena themselves took place from one to four years before Mr. Hodgson went to India.

Now the Report is entitled: "REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INVESTIGATE PHENOMENA CONNECTED WITH THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY."

But :

- (1) The Society never investigated the phenomena.
- (2) It delegated the work to a Committee.
- (3) The Committee never investigated the phenomena.
- (4) The Committee delegated the work to Mr. Hodgson to investigate the evidence for phenomena which had taken place years previously.
- (5) Mr. Hodgson, therefore, did not investigate the phenomena.

Consequently, the very title on the Report is misleading, for "the phenomena connected with the Theosophical Society" were not investigated at all. What was investigated was simply the evidence of persons said to have witnessed the phenomena; and what the Committee really endeavoured to do—as is shown by the words of the Report itself—was to find 'plausible' theories whereby the genuine nature of the phenomena could be explained away. To what lengths this *plausibility* goes will appear in due course.

The Report is by no means an easy one to assimilate in all its

the real *inwardness* of it—perhaps I should rather say the real *shallowness* of it—is so wrapped up in a mass of ‘plausible’ assumptions that it is not easy to disentangle the really important from the spurious and irrelevant matter.

One can very well understand that a reader already prejudiced against Mme. Blavatsky, or against Theosophy itself, would not easily accept with satisfaction, but without any critical judgment, the seemingly ‘plausible’ conclusions of the Committee, and would also readily be able to pick out here and there sentences which lend themselves to a cheap and vulgar ridicule. I do not propose that one in ten of Mme. Blavatsky’s critics and detractors have quoted from this Report have taken the trouble to read it from beginning to end, much less to analyse it, or to apply to it the recognized principles of legal evidence.

It is, in fact, only by patient and detailed analysis that the evidence—or rather the lack of any real evidence—for the conclusions formed, the bias of the investigator, and the irrelevancy of many of the conclusions, are brought to light. I may further and say, that but for my own intimate knowledge of what has been left out of the Report I should not have been able to appreciate or evaluate its spurious character.

Apart from that, however, when one patiently endeavours to evaluate the weight of evidence on the one side or the other, the amazing conclusion dawns upon one that, *according to the Report* only credible witnesses are the witnesses for the prosecution. The manner in which Mr. Hodgson endeavours to discredit the philosophical witnesses, the trifling inconsistencies which he lays out and magnifies for this purpose, will be shown presently ; there is an entire absence from the Report of any similar attempt to discredit the evidence of the Coulombs, who, of all the witnesses, are the most to be distrusted, since their evidence was given out of revenge, and they were paid by the missionaries for the Judas betrayal of their benefactor, Mme. Blavatsky.

As a final instance of the way in which all evidence for the defence was treated, I may say that the letters which Mme. Coulomb said she had received from Mme. Blavatsky, and which Mme. Blavatsky said were forgeries, were withheld by the Committee of the S.P.R., and neither Mme. Blavatsky nor any of the Theosophists were ever allowed to see them.

THE REPORT: MR. HODGSON

Mr. Richard Hodgson, B.A., was a young man of whose qualifications for the task entrusted to him by the S.P.R. it is not possible to say anything except what one may judge from the Report itself. He appears to have had an unlimited amount of self-confidence, and we must at least credit him with a considerable capacity for painstaking detail; but he does not appear to have had any acquaintance with the laws of evidence, and still less with the nature of the occult phenomena with which he was called upon to deal. Psychical research at that time had not accumulated the evidence for the *possibility* of the genuineness of the phenomena which is available to-day. In *The Occult Review* for April 1923 Mr. Ralph Shirley, the editor, writes as follows:

"It was many years after this (S.P.R. Report) when the S.P.R. came to learn, in the case of Eusapia Palladino, that even consistent trickery may go hand in hand with occult phenomena which will stand the most rigid investigation, and found themselves compelled to recant in Eusapia's favour an earlier adverse decision. But in the case of Mme. Blavatsky, a far more complex character and a far more remarkable personality had to be dealt with, and neither Mr. Hodgson nor probably any other members of the Society in question were equal to tackling so profound a psychological problem."

Mr. Sinnett, in his reply to the S.P.R. Report,¹ points out also that Mr. Hodgson was totally unfamiliar with the native mind in relation to the occult matters with which Theosophy was dealing; that they strongly resented any attempt by Europeans to obtain admittance into the inner arcana of Eastern Occultism, and would in fact do all in their power to throw dust in the eyes of "an exceedingly self-reliant young man from England attempting the investigation of occult mysteries by the methods of a Scotland Yard detective." This will largely account for Mr. Hodgson having found the native witnesses so unreliable: witnesses in respect of whom, as Mr. Sinnett says, he should have been particularly on his guard. Mr. Hodgson went to India in November 1884, and returned to England in April 1885 (p. 203).

Mr. Hodgson's examination of witnesses, and the whole

¹ See *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, p. 306.

method of his procedure is so absolutely one-sided that we cannot admit his preliminary claim to be completely impartial; nor can we admit that his acceptance of telepathy as a proved fact constituted any qualification or 'safeguard' (p. 208) against prejudice. As a matter of fact he does not once mention telepathy as a possible explanation of some of the phenomena, though Mrs. Sidgwick does so when she wishes to *discredit* a certain phenomenon (see p. 395).

Let us see, however, to what extent Mr. Hodgson's own statements are to be relied on.

On pp. 357, 358 of the Report we find a statement by Mr. Mohini M. Chatterji to the effect that on one occasion when with Mme. Blavatsky he had heard the direct voice of one of the Masters speaking from another part of the room, and that he had heard Mme. Blavatsky speaking at the same time, so that it could not have been ventriloquism on her part. Commenting on this Mr. Hodgson says: "Concerning this incident, I need only remind the reader of the hollow in the wall, which was near the corner of Mme. Blavatsky's room. The confederate *may have been* [*italics mine*] Babula, previously instructed in the reply, and with a mango leaf in his mouth to disguise his voice." Really! How very simple, how very 'easy' to explain the matter away thus! It is a good sample of all his 'explanations'; but what is it worth as *evidence* of fraud? Less than nothing, for it is a *suggestio falsi*. The joke of the matter is that the phenomenon did not take place at Adyar, where Mme. Blavatsky's room had a "hollow in the wall" and a confederate who could speak "with a mango leaf in his mouth". *It took place at Darjeeling*.¹ But then of course there *might have been* more confederates and more mango leaves there! They appear according to Mr. Hodgson's account to have existed all over India, whether Mme. Blavatsky was on the spot or thousands of miles away. We shall come across one presently even riding out of Tibet into Sikkhim to personate a Mahatma.

That Mr. Hodgson's own statements are not to be relied on may be further shown in one very important matter. I shall in fact show that in this case we must—if we apply Mr. Hodgson's own methods and language—accuse him of "a wilful and deliberate falsehood" (p. 230). This is a phrase which he uses in connexion with the evidence of Mr. Damodar K. Mavalankar, a witness he particularly desires to discredit, and which related to the question

¹ See A. P. Sinnett's *The Occult World Phenomena and the S.P.R.* George 1886.

as to who had charge of the keys of Mme. Blavatsky's rooms when she was at Ootacamund in 1883. On one occasion Mr. Damodar had said the keys were in his possession; on another occasion he said that they were in the possession of the Coulombs. It is the first of these statements that Mr. Hodgson characterizes as a "wilful and deliberate falsehood".

Now, it so happens that this same question as to the possession of the keys of Mme. Blavatsky's rooms comes up later in the Report with reference to the interval between Mme. Blavatsky leaving Adyar in February 1884 and the dismissal of the Coulombs in the following May. This interval is the one during which the Theosophical Board of Control said that M. Coulomb had constructed the various contrivances in the Occult Room and in Mme. Blavatsky's room which were afterwards asserted by them to have been used for the production of bogus phenomena. It is Mr. Hodgson's endeavour to show—as counsel for the prosecution—that M. Coulomb could not have constructed these contrivances during the time stated. This is what he says (p. 340)—the *italics* are mine :

"Now it would appear that after Mme. Blavatsky's departure from head-quarters in 1884, the Occult Room and the Shrine *were in charge of Mr. Damodar* (see Appendix XI); and moreover *it is apparently not denied* by the Theosophists that workmen were about on the terrace during the interval assigned to M. Coulomb for his secret work, and *according to Mr. Damodar* the door of the stairs was at all times open. If M. Coulomb under these circumstances could, without the knowledge of any persons at head-quarters, have constructed the double-backed cupboard, the panel in the boarding, the sideboard panel, and the aperture into the recess, he would have performed a feat which I should find much more difficult of explanation than all Mme. Blavatsky's phenomena together."

Very well. Let us see what this apparently crushing statement is worth.

In the first place, he says that the keys of the Occult Room and the Shrine were in charge of Mr. Damodar after Mme. Blavatsky's departure. Turning, however, to p. 280 of the Report, I find him saying: "The reader will remember that the contrivances for trickery were investigated (by the Board of Control) *when M. Coulomb gave up the keys of Mme. Blavatsky's rooms on May 17th or 18th.*" Also in a 'Mahatma' letter which I have quoted later (p. 38), and which Mr. Hodgson says was "no doubt written by Mme. Blavatsky", it is stated that: "They

the Coulombs] are sole masters of the top story. They alone have full entrance to and control of the premises." Again, on p. 217 Mr. Hodgson says definitely : "When Mme. Blavatsky and Col. Olcott left Madras to come to Europe in 1884 M. and Mme. Coulomb were left in complete charge of Mme. Blavatsky's rooms." Finally, on p. 222 he says : "The panels in the wardrobe in the teak-wood door were shown by M. Coulomb to the Board of Control *when he gave up the keys of Mme. Blavatsky's rooms in May 1884.*"

So then, Mr. Hodgson, it appears that, like your own condemnation of Mr. Damodar's evidence, you can say one thing at one time and exactly the opposite at another time as may suit your purpose. Shall we then apply to you the same words that you have used about Mr. Damodar in a like case? Well, at all events we shall say that it absolutely discredits your contention that M. Coulomb could not have constructed the appliances for evidence of trickery at the time stated; and it also, to say the very least of it, reflects most seriously upon the reliability of your statements in general. We shall in fact apply to you the words which you have applied to Col. Olcott in another place : "The testimony of Col. Olcott (Mr. Hodgson) himself I found to be fundamentally at variance with fact in so many important points that it became impossible for me to place the slightest value upon the evidence he had offered" (p. 210). This statement of yours concerning Col. Olcott has not the slightest value in view of your own lack of truth, and plain intention to discredit every witness for the defence.

With regard to the rest of the paragraph I have quoted, I need merely say that notwithstanding that he has found Damodar such an untruthful (?) witness, he can, it appears, quote him and accept his word whenever it suits his purpose to do so.

Here is another case of Mr. Hodgson's truthfulness (?). On p. 220 we find him saying :

Room of the
Mme. Blavatsky's
er which
says was
: "They
" Moreover, the Occult Room, *when I first received permission to inspect it*, had been considerably altered; its walls were covered with fresh plaster, and I was informed by Mr. Damodar that all traces of the alleged 'machinations' of the Coulombs in connexion with the shrine had been obliterated. This was not true, for the bricked frame and the aperture into the recess still existed."

Now if this means anything it means that the aperture existed *when he first visited the room*; and here again he makes the

unfortunate Damodar to be a liar. On turning to p. 228 we find him stating the following :

" Now with respect to the sideboard aperture and the recess, these were, as I afterwards found, still in existence when I arrived at Adyar, though Mr. Damodar stated to me that the recess had been blocked up. This last statement of Mr. Damodar's I can regard only as a deliberate misrepresentation."

Very good. So far the paragraph confirms the one on p. 220 above quoted. But he goes on to say :

" Had I known that the recess still existed, I should of course myself have endeavoured to enter, and should at once have discovered the untruth of Mr. Damodar's account of his own entrance." (That is to say that he was only able to enter with great difficulty.)

But this second part of the paragraph absolutely negatives the first part and the statement on p. 220 above, in which he says that these contrivances *did* exist when he first visited the room. Who then is here the liar, Mr. Hodgson or Mr. Damodar ?

But what are we to think of the Committee of the S.P.R. itself ? What sort of a critical analysis could they have made of Mr. Hodgson's Report to have overlooked the glaring inconsistencies I have now pointed out ? It becomes more and more evident as we proceed that the case was so absolutely prejudged that all sense of proportion, of justice, or of truth had been obscured and placed in the background. As regards Mr. Hodgson's assertion that Mr. Damodar was a confederate with Mme. Blavatsky and the Coulombs, there is at least one letter in the Blavatsky-Coulomb letters which would negative this, and none which would support it. It is the letter No. 9 (p. 214) in which Mme. Blavatsky is represented as asking Mme. Coulomb to convey a letter to Damodar " in a miraculous way ". By why so if Damodar was a confederate ? Damodar's whole life and action in giving up his family and caste negatives all Hodgson's assertions about his dishonesty and complicity ; and Mr. Hodgson himself acknowledges (p. 310) that he had deprived himself of substantial property and sacrificed his worldly prospects for the sake of Theosophy. Mr. Hodgson, however, in his usual conjectural manner, endeavours to furnish Mr. Damodar with motives far other than that of enthusiasm for the cause.

Finally, as regards Damodar, it is recorded in Col. Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves* (Vol. III, p. 265) that on the 23rd April 1885 he set out on the final stages of his journey into Tibet to go to the

This is what Col. Olcott says, after quoting the last entry in Damodar's *Diary*, saying that he was proceeding from Labi alone :

"Here the Diary ends, and this is the last written trace of this devoted, high-minded, enthusiastic young Brahmin, whose record of joining H. P. B. and myself at Bombay is one of unbroken energy and unfaltering zeal in the cause of humanity. A nobler heart never beat in a human breast, and his departure was one of the hardest blows we ever received. As above remarked, he had almost broken down his constitution by incessant official work, and when leaving Bombay had begun to spit blood and show signs of a rapid decline. Yet, with undaunted courage, he undertook the hard journey across the Himalayas, indifferent to the biting cold, the drifted snow, the lack of shelter and food, intent upon reaching the Guru whom he had first seen in his youth when lying on a sick bed, of whom he had lost sight for many years, but whom he recovered soon after joining the Theosophical Society, as his spiritual faculties developed, and he was able to seek him in the *sukshma sarira*. . . . The last that was seen of him by the coolies was when, with face turned towards the Tibetan frontier, he trudged painfully on and disappeared behind a turning of the road."

Well, was that the act of one who had played the part of a confederate to Mme. Blavatsky in the production of 'bogus Mahatmas' ? Whether Mr. Hodgson knew of this incident before he published his Report or not I am unable to say. He would apparently be on his return voyage when it took place. But in any case such an incident as this goes a very long way towards the absolute falsification, not merely of what Mr. Hodgson has said about Damodar in his Report, but even of the whole Report itself.

With regard to Mr. Hodgson's acceptance of the evidence of the Coulombs, we find a strange absence in the Report of the meticulous analysis of their evidence, which Mr. Hodgson exhibits in the case of witnesses for the defence. From the fact that they were paid by the missionaries for their 'disclosures', as also that they were by self-acknowledgment fraudulent people, there should have been the greatest possible caution ; but one would gather from the Report that there was not a single case in which the Coulombs were discovered in any way to have been unreliable witnesses, or to have contradicted themselves ; and where their evidence is contradicted by theosophical witnesses it is invariably accepted in preference to that of the latter. Mr. Hodgson says on p. 20 that he has never trusted to any unverified statements of the Coulombs, but that "neither by frequent cross-examination

nor by independent investigation of their statements *wherever circumstances permitted*, have I been able to break down any allegations of theirs which were *in any way material*."

One must note the reservations which I have italicized in this sentence. Mr. Hodgson does not give us any indication as to the number of times he has accepted their evidence where "circumstances" did *not* permit; and he is apparently the sole judge as to those in which their allegations "were in any way material". There is in the Report a strange absence of any mention of this "independent investigation of their statements". I can only find two mentioned. The first of these is in connexion with the so-called 'saucer phenomenon' (p. 218), in which a broken saucer is said to have been phenomenally repaired in the Shrine. Hodgson's explanation of this is, that a similar whole saucer was introduced into the Shrine through the back by M. Coulomb. This was the Coulombs' statement, and Mr. Hodgson endeavours to confirm it in the following manner. He says:

"The whole 'saucer' found in the Shrine was shown to me at Adyar at my request. I examined it carefully, and I also examined carefully the broken pieces of the saucer which Mme. Coulomb exhibited as those for which the whole saucer had been substituted. The two 'saucers' manifestly formed a pair."

He then goes on to say that he had ascertained that "two porcelain pin trays" had been purchased at a shop by Mme. Coulomb on the 3rd July, at least five weeks prior to the date of the phenomenon. He says that 'pin trays' better describes the articles than 'saucers'. Very well. The first question we should ask in a cross-examination is: How does Hodgson know that the saucer or pin tray shown to him at Adyar, and the pieces shown to him by Mme. Coulomb were the actual ones used in the phenomenon? We may legitimately make use here of Mr. Hodgson's method of arguing which runs through the whole Report. We shall therefore say: *Assuming* that the Coulombs were at the time collecting material for a subsequent charge of fraud against Mme. Blavatsky—and there is every reason to think that they were—what could have been easier for them than to have substituted, *after the event*, another saucer, to wit, one of the 'pin trays', for the whole one? Who was there to identify the saucer? The answer is, General Morgan and Damodar, the only other people present besides the Coulombs when the 'phenomenon' took place. There is no word to show that Hodgson took any trouble to obtain this absolutely necessary confirmation.

We may remark further, with regard to this incident, that it is absolutely necessary in support of the Coulomb's assertion and Mr. Hodgson's theory that there should have been an opening at that time into the back of the Shrine from Mme. Blavatsky's room. This opening Hodgson has *assumed*, but cannot be said to have proved; whilst, on the other hand, there is a mass of evidence from various witnesses that such an opening did *not* exist. All this evidence Mr. Hodgson tries to explain away by the assumption or another of unreliability on the part of the witnesses.

But what finally disposes of the theory of fraud in this case is the letter which Mme. Coulomb herself wrote to Mme. Blavatsky describing the incident. Mme. Blavatsky was at the time at Potacamund, and the only thing to connect her with the incident in the forged letters, Nos. 2, 3, and 4 of the Report (p. 212). These letters, it may be observed, are not dated. On the 13th August Mme. Coulomb wrote to Mme. Blavatsky describing the incident, regretting the breakage of the saucer, and saying, among other things: "I verily believe I shall go silly if I stay with you. . . . I say you have dealings with *old Nick*." This is a view which Mme. Coulomb had expressed previously, as she was supposed to be a Christian! But would she have written thus had she been a confederate? Mr. Hodgson says: "It is easy to read between the lines of Mme. Coulomb's letter, even without her statement that Mme. Blavatsky told her to be prudent in what she wrote." Yes, it appears to be very easy for Mr. Hodgson to read much which exists only in his own imagination; but he does not explain why Mme. Blavatsky, who thus cautioned Mme. Coulomb as to being prudent in what she wrote, should herself have been so very *imprudent* as the forged letters would make her out to be.

The second incident in which Mr. Hodgson endeavours to establish outside confirmation is similar to the first, and refers to a pair of vases which Col. Olcott said he had received phenomenally. I shall not occupy space with the details, because Hodgson did not see the vases, which, he says, "had disappeared mysteriously"; insinuating that Mme. Blavatsky herself had made away with them.

Now Hodgson found that Mme. Coulomb had purchased *two* pairs of vases at a certain shop on the 25th May, and Olcott's entry in his diary shows that the 'phenomenon' happened on the 26th. But what is there to show that the vases which he received were the ones purchased by Mme. Coulomb? Nothing

whatever but the word of the Coulombs ; nor is there anything to show that these vases were purchased under instructions from Mme. Blavatsky.

Another case of the loose way in which Mr. Hodgson pieces together his 'evidence' is to be found on p. 260. He is trying to explain how one of the phenomena described by Mr. Sinnett in *The Occult World*, might have been fraudulently produced.

He begins by asking : "What arrangements would be necessary for the phenomenon if it was a trick ? Mme. Blavatsky, *we may suppose*"—does so-and-so. Then in a foot-note he naïvely remarks : "M. Coulomb declares the arrangements were as here described." Indeed ! And what 'independent investigation' has he to bring forward to support M. Coulomb's statement ? None whatever. Not merely so, but it would appear that M. Coulomb made this statement *after being prompted by Hodgson* ; for it is Hodgson who suggests the 'arrangements' in the first instance. But further than this : the 'arrangements' necessitated the *assumption* of a confederate at Mr. Sinnett's home eight hundred miles away ; this confederate having previously been instructed to place a piece of broken plaster plaque in a drawer in Mr. Sinnett's room, and also a Mahatma letter in a *closed* telegram envelope. This latter he is *supposed* by Hodgson to have done, "*possibly* by careful manipulation of the eyelets which are used to fasten telegram envelopes in India ; *possibly* by substituting eyelets slightly larger." But as regards this latter part of the 'arrangements' there is an utter absence of confirmatory evidence of the further suggestion that the 'confederate' who was to do these *supposed* manipulations was Mr. Bhavani Rao, who was at Mr. Sinnett's house at the time with Col. Olcott. Mr. Hodgson apparently does not dare to suggest that the confederate might have been Col. Olcott himself. Mr. Hodgson "can find no improbability in the supposition" that Bhavani Rao was the confederate. Very well : Hodgson is no doubt entitled to form what opinions he likes ; but where is the *proof* in all this mass of suppositions ? Is there any genuine psychical phenomenon whatever which cannot be, and which has not as a matter of fact been, explained away by one sceptic or another on a similar basis of *what might have been* the case ? There is a vast difference between a *might have been* and a *was*. In the one case we are entitled to reserve our judgment ; but we are certainly *not* entitled to level accusations of fraud as if we had definitely proved the case. If we are to say *was* we must have very definite

proof, and of that proof—apart from the word of the Coulombs—there is a total absence in the S.P.R. Report.

One reads with ever-increasing disgust these conjectural phrases with which almost every page is freely besprinkled: it may have been '—' there is nothing which might not have been '—' it might well have been '—' it would appear '—' it is possible '—' what seems to have happened '—' probably '—' I think '—' we may suppose '—' she might have '—' cannot be regarded as at all unlikely '—' there might have been '—' she may have '—etc., etc. On one page (268) I find: 'inclined to explain'—'probably' (twice)—'may have' (seven times)—'seems to have'—'may not have'—'might have'. Is it any wonder that in the end Hodgson succeeded in persuading himself that all these suppositions were what really happened, so that he finally sticks at nothing, and rejects as 'unreliable', or else as 'deliberate lies', every scrap of evidence offered for the genuine explanation? Is it any wonder that, going altogether outside the limits of his own investigations, he finally takes his courage in both hands and declares his "unqualified opinion" that "*no genuine psychical phenomena whatever* will be found among the pseudo-mysteries of the Russian lady *alias* Koot Hoomi Lal Sing *alias* Mahatma Morya *alias* Mme. Blavatsky"?

Well! that 'puts the lid on' the matter with a vengeance! Every one who has testified to these phenomena is thus coolly written down as either a fool or a dupe—or perhaps worse—and this must include all the members of Mme. Blavatsky's own family who have testified to her extraordinary psychic powers from her childhood onwards.

To show to what lengths Mr. Hodgson can go—we might perhaps say, rather, to what depths he can descend—in his endeavour to discredit witnesses, we may instance the following:

It is tolerably well known that Mme. Fadéef, Mme. Blavatsky's aunt, has placed it on record that about the year 1870, when Mme. Blavatsky had not been heard of by her family for several years, and they were ready to believe that she was dead, she (Mme. F.) received in Odessa a letter in French, in the handwriting afterwards familiar as that of 'K.H.', telling her that her niece was alive, and would be restored to her family "before 18 new moons shall have risen". This letter is in fact the first 'K.H.' document on record, and is many years previous to any other similar communication. Mme. Fadéef goes on to say that this letter "was brought to me in the most incomprehensible

and mysterious manner, by a messenger of Asiatic appearance, who then disappeared before my very eyes".

Commenting upon this on p. 292 of his Report Mr. Hodgson says :

"I think it not improbable that this document was written by Mme. Blavatsky in 1879 or 1880, when the idea of corresponding with one of the "Brothers" appears to have been first mooted. In weighing the statement of Mme. Fadéef that she received the document about the year 1870, we should remember that she is a Russian lady, and the aunt of Mme. Blavatsky, and that Mme. Blavatsky may have been influenced by political motives in the founding of the Theosophical Society."

In other words, because Mme. Fadéef is a Russian lady, and the aunt of Mme. Blavatsky—she is probably a liar !

Mr. Hodgson, it appears, afterwards became a convinced spiritualist ; and I have no doubt that if this had been the case when he was 'investigating' Mme. Blavatsky's phenomena, he would have given a very different account of them, and would in all probability have put her down as a very powerful medium.

Mr. Hodgson's method of dealing with the overwhelming evidence for the existence of the Masters or Mahatmas given by those who had met with them in the flesh, is characteristic of all his other 'plausible' hypotheses. This is what he says on p. 245 :

"I need not say much on the other alleged appearances of Mahatmas in either their ordinary physical or their 'astral' bodies. A confederate in disguise is generally an easy and sufficient explanation of them."

Really ! We may of course agree that the explanation is 'easy' enough ; but as for its being 'sufficient', we may ask here again : Would it be sufficient in a court of law without any proof ? No doubt it is sufficient enough for any sceptic, but is it true ? What proof has Mr. Hodgson to offer for his theory in every case ? Not a scrap apart from the word of the Coulombs that on two or three occasions they had personated the Mahatmas at the head-quarters of the Society. Their mere word in this respect is absolutely valueless, and in any case it does not deal with the physical and 'astral' appearances of the Mahatmas at quite other places. I shall refer to one of these physical appearances later on (p. 51).

Is it believable that in such a mass of evidence as the Coulombs have given relative to phenomena which took place from one to four years previously there should have been no contradictions.

no small slips even? Mr. Hodgson only records one instance of the latter (p. 219) where Mme. Coulomb says in reference to the 'saucer' incident that she gave two rupees eight annas each, instead of this amount for the pair. Instance after instance is given by Mr. Hodgson of the unreliability of witnesses for the defence on account of small slips like this. Mr. Sinnett complains bitterly in his published reply to the Report that Mr. Hodgson has discredited his evidence on account of a difference between ten and thirty seconds in reference to two different accounts of a certain phenomenon. Mr. Sinnett's remarks are worth giving here. He says of this discrepancy of a few seconds that:

"It is nevertheless the foundation of the major part of Mr. Hodgson's subsequent theorizing about my book (*The Occult World*). I am an inaccurate man; I must be given up; I have been shown to have told one story at one time and another at another about the same thing, and there is an end of me. And whatever I may say after this, even if the thing itself does not betray error, it is impossible to have confidence in so careless an estimator of seconds. And the picture Mr. Hodgson gives of himself opening a letter—doubtless with ready appliances of boiling water and all that may be wanted—his monstrous assumption that Mme. Blavatsky has "probably superior skill and practice" at such work—with water, it is to be presumed, always boiling in her pocket—is merely the beginning of the stupendous pyramid of extravagant conjecture which he builds, bottom upwards, upon the famous discrepancy of the seconds; and which men with reputations for intelligence to squander, are, marvellous to say, not ashamed to publish in the Proceedings of the Psychical Research Society." ¹

That is, as Mr. Sinnett says, a very good example of the way in which he has treated every witness *except the Coulombs*. The conclusion is inevitable: that Mr. Hodgson must have deliberately suppressed everything tending to discredit in the least degree the evidence of the Coulombs.

So much for the 'evidence', the reliability, the *truth* of the young man whose Report the S.P.R. accepted, apparently without even a critical examination on their part, and certainly without giving the defendant the slightest opportunity of examining it, or of replying before they branded her as a fraud and a charlatan.

Can they be said to have done this in their zeal for TRUTH? Well, if so, then we may perhaps be allowed to say, *O sancta simplicitas!*

¹ The 'Occult World Phenomena' and the Society for Psychical Research by A. P. Sinnett, 1886, p. 17.

THE REPORT: THE COULOMBS

The whole issue of Mr. Hodgson's Report turns practically on the truth or otherwise of the statements made by M. and Mme. Coulomb. These statements were, that they had assisted Mme. Blavatsky in causing bogus letters purporting to have come from the Mahatmas to appear apparently miraculously at various times and places, and more particularly in connexion with the 'Shrine' in the Occult Room at Adyar. They are also said to have impersonated the Mahatmas on some occasions when these were supposed to have made an 'astral' appearance.

Now with regard to the above I may remark at once that there is not in Mr. Hodgson's Report a single scrap of *direct* evidence in any single case in support of their statements. The evidence—if such it can be called—which Mr. Hodgson brings forward is entirely circumstantial and inferential.

We lay our finger here on what is perhaps the decisive factor which would cause us to discredit totally the evidence and statements of the Coulombs. It is this: According to Mr. Hodgson, almost every one at Theosophical head-quarters appears to have been implicated in some way or another in a conspiracy to defraud. It would appear to have been a sort of mutual deception society. Mme. Blavatsky is accused of having had innumerable confederates besides the Coulombs; indeed, she would seem, according to Mr. Hodgson, to have had these confederates not merely at head-quarters but all over India. Now, how is it that out of this army of confederates not a single one comes forward to support the statements of the Coulombs? Not merely so, but Mme. Coulomb in her published statement ("Some Account of my Intercourse with Mme. Blavatsky") does not even mention any one as being implicated in these deceptions. Is it credible that if Mr. Hodgson's wholesale suppositions as to confederates were true, Mme. Coulomb would not know of at least some of them, and have called them to her side in support of her statements? Is it credible that the missionaries would not also have bribed one or two of these, as they bribed the Coulombs, to sell their 'evidence'? According to Mr. Hodgson, Mr. Damodar was the principal confederate at head-quarters. How is it that Mme. Coulomb does not implicate him? Not merely so, but as I have already stated (p. 20), in

one of the forged letters she is requested to convey to Damodar Mahatma letter "*in a miraculous way*". Why so if Damodar was a confederate? Of the impossibility of his being a confederate I have already said sufficient on p. 21. The plain fact is that the statements of the Coulombs rest entirely on their own word—except as regards the forged letters, with which I deal later on. Just imagine: out of the whole army of confederates not one to support them! Would the evidence of "persons like the Coulombs" have been accepted in a court of law without this support?

Well, then, the only evidence which they produce to support their statements consists of a number of letters said by them to have been written to Mme. Coulomb by Mme. Blavatsky, and which, if genuine, would undoubtedly appear to be decisive as to the matter of certain instructions given to the Coulombs to produce bogus phenomena. And even then we cannot account for Mr. Hodgson's supposed innumerable confederates. The genuineness or otherwise of these letters turns entirely on the question of the handwriting experts' evidence; but with that I shall deal later on. What I must now consider are the facts about the Coulombs themselves, and Mr. Hodgson's method of dealing with their evidence apart from the question of the letters.

The Report states (p. 203) that:

"M. and Mme. Coulomb had occupied positions of trust at the head-quarters of the Theosophical Society for some years, but had been expelled from it, in May 1884, by the General Council of that Society during the absence of Mme. Blavatsky and Col. Olcott in Europe."

The reasons for this expulsion are mentioned by Mr. Hodgson on pp. 278 ff, but are not given in full. I therefore give them here, premising that the Coulombs were cited to appear before the General Council on the 13th May 1884. The following were the charges laid against them as set forth in the official report of the meeting.¹

- I. It was shown by four affidavits, that Mme. Coulomb repeatedly said to members of the Theosophical Society as well as to outsiders, that the Theosophical Society had for its object the overthrow of the British rule in India.
- II. Nine affidavits gave evidence that she said that the objects of the Society were inimical to what she believed to be true religion.

¹ See *Report of Observations, etc.*, by F. Hartmann.

- III. Ten affidavits proved that Mme. Coulomb frequently said that the 'occult phenomena' occurring at head-quarters were frauds, while at other occasions she said they were the works of the devil.
- IV. Four affidavits went to show Mme. Coulomb guilty of attempting to extort money from members of the Society.
- V. Three affidavits proved that she had wasted the funds of the Society.
- VI. All the affidavits showed her guilty of lying and backbiting.
- VII. One affidavit proved her guilty of having grossly slandered H. P. B.
- VIII. Two affidavits stated how she had dissuaded people from joining the Society.
- IX. All the affidavits agreed unanimously, that her presence at the head-quarters was causing an immense waste of time, energy, money, and that her continuance there was against the interests of the T.S.
- X. Letters proved that a blackmailing letter was sent to H. P. B. by Mme. Coulomb.

The charges against M. Coulomb were :

- I. Aiding and abetting his wife in the above described machinations.
- II. Disobedience to the orders of the Board of Control.

As the result of this Council Meeting—Mme. Coulomb having neither acknowledged nor denied any of the charges—the Coulombs were discharged.

This crisis appears to have been hastened by a 'Mahatma' letter addressed to Dr. Hartmann, and given to him by Damodar. Mr. Hodgson's theory about this letter is that it was 'no doubt' (p. 279) written by Mme. Blavatsky—who was then apparently in Paris—that it was posted to Damodar, and would reach him 'about' April 26th, on which date he gave it to Dr. Hartmann. There is, however, not a scrap of proof of this, not even the calculation as to how it would reach Damodar *about* the 26th. Now this letter says :

"For some time already the woman [Mme. Coulomb] has opened communication—a regular diplomatic *pourparlers*—with the enemies of the cause, certain *padris*. She hopes for more than 2,000 rupees from them if she helps them ruining or at least injuring the Society by injuring the reputation of the Founders. Moreover, *when needed*, trap-doors *will be found*, as they have been forthcoming for some time. They are sole masters of the top story. They alone have full entrance to and control of the premises."

The letter contains some further remarks which I need not quote here. Mr. Hodgson's theory about this letter is (p. 302) that Mme. Blavatsky wrote it and posted it from Paris to Damodar in order to serve as a guard against the disclosure of the trick "apparatus". He says also: "The substance of the document is certainly much more suggestive of the cunning combined with the inevitable ignorance of Mme. Blavatsky in Paris, than of any divine wisdom or knowledge of the supposed "Mahatma M" of India."

What might suggest itself here, however, to an impartial reader is rather, I think, that in endeavouring to prove so much cunning and foresight on the part of Mme. Blavatsky, Mr. Hodgson cuts the ground from under his own feet. He proves too much; for such an accomplished impostor would certainly never have given herself away as she is represented to have done in the forged letters.

Now with the exception of the letter above quoted, in which it is stated that the Coulombs expected to receive 2,000 rupees from the padris for their 'exposure', Mr. Hodgson does not mention or deal with this most important item in considering the motives of the Coulombs, and its bearing upon their testimony as reliable witnesses. That the Coulombs were paid by the Madras Christian College authorities is acknowledged; though the exact amount that they received is uncertain. As to the morality of this transaction, we may leave our readers to decide for themselves.

Apart from the College authorities having obtained "the best evidence possible at Madras as to the genuineness of the handwriting" of the Blavatsky-Coulomb letters (p. 208), they do not appear to have taken any steps towards ascertaining the reliability or truth of the statements made by the Coulombs. Mme. Coulomb appears, from her own statements, to have regarded, during the whole time that she was at head-quarters, the phenomena of Mme. Blavatsky as "the work of the devil". Mr. Hodgson makes no attempt to dispute this; but it is absolutely incompatible with the theory that Mme. Coulomb had herself produced so many of them by tricks.

Dr. Hartmann in his aforementioned pamphlet, *Report on Observations*, etc., thus describes Mme. Coulomb (p. 21):

"A weird witch-like creature, with wrinkled features, a stinging look and an uncouth form. She seemed to consider it her especial purpose of life to pry into everybody's private affairs, pick up stray letters here and there, that were not addressed to her, probably for

the purpose of studying the handwriting ; she attempted to wriggle herself into the confidence of new-comers, and had a way of finding out their secrets by pretending to tell their fortunes by means of a pack of cards ; while at the same time she would try to awaken the sympathies of strangers by her tales, how from a life of luxury she had sunk down to a position of servitude, and if she found a willing ear she would never hesitate a moment to insinuate that the whole Society was a humbug, the phenomena produced by fraud, and that 'she could tell many things, if she only wanted to do so'. If asked to explain herself she would say : 'My mouth is shut up, I cannot talk against the people whose bread I eat', and when she was told that the occult phenomena occurred even when Mme. Blavatsky was thousands of miles away, she would say that 'she knew what she knew'. . . . She had arrived at head-quarters penniless, and had been taken into the house by Mme. Blavatsky out of charity."

One of the 'stray letters' mentioned above which Mme. Coulomb would pick up and keep for future use was a fragment in Mme. Blavatsky's handwriting which appeared to give credence to the accusation that she was a Russian spy. This was duly passed on to Mr. Hodgson, and he publishes it on p. 317, and also gives it in facsimile. Alas for Mr. Hodgson's theory : this fragment was either a discarded portion of a translation which Mme. Blavatsky made at Mr. Sinnett's request for the *Pioneer* (of which he was at that time the editor) from Col. Grodekoff's *Travels in Central Asia* ; or else it was possibly a part of a translation made for the Indian Government itself, for whom Mme. Blavatsky at one time did some work. Mme. Blavatsky herself said it was for the *Pioneer*.¹

Dr. Hartmann's *Report of Observations*, it should be noted, was published in October 1884, before Mr. Hodgson visited India, and has therefore no reference to that visit or to the S.P.R. Report itself.

In December 1883, during the annual Convention of the T.S. at Adyar, Mme. Coulomb endeavoured to obtain a 'loan' of 2,000 rupees from Prince Harisinghji, who attended that Convention. In this she was unsuccessful. When Mme. Blavatsky left Adyar in February 1884 for Bombay *en route* for Europe, she visited Prince Harisinghji on the way. Mme. Coulomb had asked and had been granted permission to accompany her to Bombay, and she then made another effort to obtain this 'loan' from the Prince. The Prince complained at last to Mme. Blavatsky, who immediately put a stop to Mme. Coulomb's

¹ See Sinnett's *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, p. 311.

Dr. Hartmann, who was present, says : " Her [Mme. Blavatsky] fury knew no bounds, and her passionate outbursts of anger and jealousy were in no way soothed down by Mme. Blavatsky approaching her for her unjust attempt at extortion." Whether this was an attempt to blackmail is not stated, but Mme. Coulomb evidently thought that she had some hold on the Prince to enable her to ask for such a 'loan'. Be that as it may, this appears to have been the turning-point in her rupture with the Society, for Dr. Hartmann says that when leaving the boat at Bombay after saying good-bye to Mme. Blavatsky, she turned to Babula, Mme. Blavatsky's servant, and said : " I shall be revenged on your mistress for preventing me from getting my 2,000 rupees."

Here again we may remark that if Mme. Coulomb had had such a powerful weapon of revenge as the forged letters disclose she might, and would, have held these over Mme. Blavatsky as a threat to prevent any rupture or interference with her plans.

General Morgan writes of Mme. Coulomb :

" When we consider the characteristics of this woman, her eavesdropping, purloining of letters, her hatred of the members composing the Society, her swearing she would be revenged, her incessant espionage of Mme. Blavatsky, and those she might be talking with, the motive and manner of her concocting these letters is not difficult to understand."¹

This, and a good deal more which could be said about the Coulombs, does not appear to enter at all into Mr. Hodgson's estimate as to their reliability as witnesses, or the truth of their statements.

¹ Reply to a Report of an Examination by J. D. B. Gribble.

THE REPORT: THE 'SHRINE' PHENOMENA

The so-called Shrine was a wooden cupboard between three feet and four feet in width and height, and one foot or fifteen inches in depth, with a drawer below the cupboard portion, and with corner brackets. It was supposed to be in special occult communication by means of certain etheric or other currents with the Masters. It was hung, not fixed, against a double partition wall between the Occult Room and Mme. Blavatsky's private rooms, and there appears to have been a space about twelve inches in depth between the two portions of this double partition wall. There appears also to have been a space of some inches between the Shrine itself and the wall against which it was hung. The Shrine contained portraits of two of the Masters, and some other 'sacred' articles, and was an object of great veneration by the native *chelas*, though it does not appear to have been so to other natives who visited the place, nor to the Europeans at head-quarters.

Mr. Hodgson, in order to sustain his theories of fraud in connexion with this Shrine, had to prove first of all that the Shrine had a movable back; and in the second place that there was a hole in the party-wall at the back of the Shrine so that letters, etc., could be placed in it from Mme. Blavatsky's room.

I may note here, first of all, that Mr. Hodgson never saw the Shrine, for it had been removed and destroyed after the Coulombs were expelled, and before Mr. Hodgson reached India. The date appears to have been September 20th (see p. 220).

With regard to the back of the Shrine, and the possible existence of a movable portion, the evidence is very conflicting, though many witnesses assert that they had thoroughly examined the Shrine and had found the back to be solid. Mr. Hodgson endeavours to discredit these witnesses by showing that according to their own statements they had not made a sufficiently close examination. Well, let us see.

Mr. Hodgson says on p. 221:

"M. Coulomb states that he removed the Shrine just after it was originally placed against the wall, sawed the middle panel (at the back) in two, and attached a piece of leather behind to serve as a handle, so that the top portion could be easily pulled up. The junction

between the two halves of the panel was, he says, hidden from those looking at the inside of the Shrine by a mirror which just covered it."

Now there is not a single mention of this mirror—which must have been three feet or four feet long—in any description of the Shrine by any of the numerous witnesses who examined it inside and outside. No one appears to have noticed it, and there is only M. Coulomb's word for it. Indeed, Mr. Hodgson himself says on p. 222, "M. Coulomb's statement as to the half panel cannot of course be verified, and must be taken for what it is worth." Precisely; but if it is worth nothing—as indeed is the case in face of the evidence of those above mentioned—the whole of Mr. Hodgson's case breaks down; for if there was no such access to the Shrine from the back, then that explanation of the Shrine phenomena, upon which Mr. Hodgson relies entirely, is absolutely discredited. And yet Mr. Hodgson builds up the whole of his case on this one assertion which he himself says cannot be verified". After this he occupies page after page of his Report in an endeavour to show that there was a hole in the wall behind the Shrine: that is to say, in the wall in the Occult room, forming one wall of the double partition between that room and Mme. Blavatsky's room.

It would occupy too much space here to go into an analysis of Mr. Hodgson's futile attempt to sustain his contention that there was such a hole. The whole weight of the evidence goes to show that there was no such hole at any time that it could have accounted for any of the Shrine phenomena. Further, it is absolutely certain from Mr. Hodgson's own showing, and from the evidence of the Board of Control, that no such hole existed when the Coulombs left; whereas it was absolutely essential in order to prove their case that such a hole should have existed. Mr. Hodgson very lamely endeavours to insinuate that the hole did once exist, but that M. Coulomb had himself filled it up. This is simply absurd, for his whole case rested on the existence of a through communication from Mme. Blavatsky's room to the interior of the Shrine. The contention of the Board of Control was, that M. Coulomb had not had time to complete this remaining piece of 'evidence' before his work was disturbed by them and he was dismissed. This is by far the most likely explanation.

Since this hole did not exist, all the evidence for a hole on the side of the partition in Mme. Blavatsky's room is superfluous, though Mr. Hodgson devoted many pages of his Report to it. There is no doubt that there was such a hole in Mme. Blavatsky's

room when the Coulombs left (see p. 19 *supra*), and this undoubtedly strengthens the contention of the Board of Control just mentioned, and confirms what is said in the occult letter I have referred to on p. 30 that "when needed trap-doors will be found".

But as regards this we may note further that Mr. Hodgson admits that at the end of October or the beginning of November 1883 Mme. Blavatsky, in consequence of a doubt expressed by Mr. G—— concerning the panelled boarding which at that time existed on Mme. Blavatsky's side of the wall, had this panelling removed and a brick wall substituted. He contends, however, that after this had been done a sideboard was placed against the bricked part, that some of the bricks were removed, and that the sideboard had a movable back which would permit of access to the space between the two partitions constituting the wall. There is no doubt that this sideboard was placed there, and also that it had a movable back when examined by the Board of Control, as well—as already said—that there was a hole in the wall on this side of the partition, for these were disclosed "when the Coulombs gave up the keys of the rooms" on their dismissal in May 1884. But there is not a scrap of evidence to show that these contrivances were available for phenomena during the time that Mme. Blavatsky was in occupation of the rooms, or that they existed at that time. Besides, of what use would they have been without the corresponding hole in the other half of the partition wall behind the Shrine; and that, according to Mr. Hodgson's own account, certainly did not exist when these other contrivances were discovered.

There were some other contrivances in the way of sliding panels in the Occult Room which were supposed by Mr. Hodgson to have been used for bogus phenomena; but, according to his own admissions, at least one of these "could, when I saw it, be opened and shut only with considerable difficulty" (p. 339). Also Mr. J. D. B. Gribble, a gentleman who visited the headquarters in October 1884, practically on behalf of the Missionaries says:

"I was also shown two of the sliding doors and panels said to have been made by M. Coulomb after Mme. Blavatsky's departure. One of these is on the outside of the so-called occult room, and the other is on the outside of the sitting-room upstairs. Both of these have been made without the slightest attempt at concealment. The former is at the top of a back staircase and consists of two doors which open into a kind of bookshelf. This gives the idea of having been constructed so as to place food on the shelves inside without opening the

The other contrivance is a sliding panel which lifts up and opens and shuts with some difficulty. *It is evidently of recent construction.* Certainly in its present state it would be difficult to carry out any phenomena by its means. In this case also there is no attempt at concealment. Neither of these two appliances communicate with the Shrine, which is situated on the cross-wall dividing the occult room from an adjoining bedroom. I was not allowed to see the Shrine" (see *A Report of an Examination*, etc., p. 29).

Mr. Gribble is slightly at fault in this last sentence in saying that he was not 'allowed' to see the Shrine, for, as we have seen, it was destroyed in September. That shows again how easily witnesses may make mistakes in their statements—mistakes which cannot really be taken as making them unreliable in respect of all their other evidence.

Now Mr. Hodgson endeavours to dispose of all this difficulty in the working of the panels by saying that: "Disuse for a few months, or a little grit, would, I think, account for this fact" (p. 223). Indeed. Are we really to accept such feeble statements "when the evidence" disposing of the case?

The real fact is, that whatever may have been the history of these sliding doors, sliding panels which 'lift up', holes in the wall, etc., etc., there is not a particle of evidence beyond the word of the Coulombs to show that any of the phenomena mentioned in connexion with the Shrine were ever produced by these means.

Setting aside the question of the forged letters, with which I shall deal immediately, and looking broadly at the question of the phenomena and Mr. Hodgson's method of dealing with the evidence for their genuineness, there is a very strong presumption that what Mr. Hodgson states as his final conclusion—*i.e.* that "no genuine psychical phenomena whatever will be found among the pseudo-mysteries of the Russian lady" (p. 317)—was in reality his starting-point. It was the *a priori* judgment that the phenomena were impossible, *therefore* no evidence for them could be valid, and every one who witnessed them was either consciously or unconsciously inaccurate or untruthful in his or her evidence.

This is in fact what his whole energies are directed to showing, and he discredits the witnesses one by one on the most trivial grounds, and suggests alternatives to explain the phenomena which will not bear a moment's examination in face of the direct evidence, since some of the most important factors which cannot be explained away are deliberately omitted from the account, or ignored.

Mr. Hodgson not merely thus discredits the witnesses for the

genuineness of the phenomena, but he appears to go to the other extreme in the case of the Coulombs, and to have accepted their evidence without any such incredulity as he exhibits in the case of the witnesses for the defence. At all events there is not in the Report the slightest indication that he applied to their evidence the same methods of meticulous analysis that he has applied to the others. It is absolutely inconceivable that the Coulombs should have been unimpeachable in their evidence, or that a cross-examination would not have convicted them of as many inaccuracies—not to say ‘deliberate misrepresentations’—as Mr. Hodgson puts forward in connexion with the actual witnesses of the phenomena—*and of which he himself is guilty.*

THE REPORT: THE HANDWRITING EVIDENCE

The letters said to have been written by Mme. Blavatsky to Mme. Coulomb, which were sold by her to the Missionary authorities, and some of which were published in the *Madras Christian College Magazine*, September and October 1884, and which would, if genuine, undoubtedly implicate Mme. Blavatsky in trickery and collusion with the Coulobms, were declared by Mme. Blavatsky to be forgeries.

The following is Mme. Blavatsky's letter to *The Times*, October 9th 1884 with regard to these letters.

"Sir,—With reference to the alleged exposure at Madras of a dishonourable conspiracy between myself and two persons of the name of Coulomb to deceive the public with occult phenomena, I have to say that the letters purporting to have been written by me are certainly not mine. Sentences here and there I recognize, taken from old notes of mine on different matters, but they are mingled with interpolations that entirely pervert their meaning. With these exceptions the whole of the letters are fabrications.

"The fabricators must have been grossly ignorant of Indian affairs, since they make me speak of a 'Maharajah of Lahore', when every Indian schoolboy knows that no such person exists."

The only evidence which the S.P.R. Report puts forward as to the genuineness of the letters is that of various handwriting experts', of whom the principal one was Mr. F. G. Netherclift—I beg Mr. Hodgson's pardon: he himself appears to have been the principal 'expert', for Mr. Netherclift gave it as his first opinion that certain letters submitted to him were *not* in Mme. Blavatsky's handwriting; but when Mr. Hodgson had returned to England, and had duly coached Mr. Netherclift, that gentleman obligingly altered his opinion (p. 282). We are naïvely told (p. 283) that Mr. Sims of the British Museum also changed his opinion under the same circumstances.

This fact of change of opinion is somewhat dishonourably set forth in the Report. On p. 204 the Committee—not Mr. Hodgson—say that Mr. Netherclift and Mr. Sims "came independently to the conclusion that the letters were written by Mme. Blavatsky". It is not till we reach pp. 282–3 in Mr. Hodgson's Report that we find the fact of the change of opinion of the 'experts'; so

that any one reading only the first opinion of the Committee is misled not merely in respect of the suppression of this fact, but also in the employment of the word 'independently'; for whether these 'experts' formed their opinions independently of each other or not, they certainly did not do so independently of Mr. Hodgson.

But further than this: the Committee of the S.P.R. appear to have been in such a hurry to condemn Mme. Blavatsky that they actually accepted Mr. Hodgson's *conclusions*, and published them six months before Mr. Hodgson's Report was completed and published! The conclusions were announced by the Committee on the 24th June; the Report, as we have seen, was published in December. On p. 276 of the Report Mr. Hodgson says:

"I have now in my hands numerous documents which are connected with the experiences of Mr. Hume and others in connexion with Mme. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society. These documents, including the K. H. MSS. above referred to, did not reach me till August, and my examination of them has involved a considerable delay in the production of this Report."¹

It is scarcely believable that a Society of 'honourable' men who had undertaken what was practically a judicial trial should have conducted it throughout in the manner in which this 'investigation' was conducted from beginning to end.

But there is perhaps even a greater stain on the reputation of the S.P.R. than this hasty promulgation of the verdict before even the evidence was completed, much less submitted to the defendant. This further stain is that neither Mme. Blavatsky herself nor any other witness for the defence was ever allowed to see the incriminating letters. How would such a proceeding have been treated in a court of law; and what credence can be given to evidence thus withheld from the defence?

Mr. Hodgson devotes more than twenty pages of his Report to a minute analysis and comparison of Mme. Blavatsky's handwriting with those of the reputed Mahatma letters, and he gives two sheets of facsimile reproductions to illustrate his conclusions that they are identical. *He does not give any analysis or comparison of the Blavatsky-Coulomb letters, nor does he give any facsimile reproductions.* The fact is hardly believable, for these are the letters on which the accusation of trickery is based; yet everything that could give the defence any chance of dealing with them

¹ See *The Occult World Phenomena and the S.P.R.*, by A. P. Sinnett.

is rigorously suppressed! This fact by itself is quite sufficient from a judicial point of view to dismiss the whole case; but what can we say of the 'honourable' gentlemen of the S.P.R.?

In cases of forgery such as this the evidence respecting the paper on which the documents in question are written, and even the ink with which they are written, is of material importance. There is not in the Report a single scrap of evidence with respect to these, nor even a mention of it. We are, I think, entitled to assume that there were substantial reasons why these letters were withheld from the defence, and this question of the paper might very possibly have been one of them.

Another point with which Mr. Hodgson does not deal is the difference between the illiterate French which appears in the letters and the educated French which Mme. Blavatsky wrote.

Mr. Hodgson says on p. 208 that he had "circumstantial evidence offered by Theosophists in proof of their being forgeries". But that evidence he has suppressed; there is not a scrap of it in the Report. He merely says that he has 'considered' it. He gives pages of theosophical evidence in the Report in the matter of phenomena, to give the impression that he is being fair to both parties; but it does not take much perspicacity to perceive that he only does this when he thinks he can show a flaw in the evidence. But this suppression of everything in connexion with the forged letters is not merely dishonest but is legally fatal to their being accepted as genuine.

But what is Mr. Netherclift's evidence as an 'expert' worth? What is the evidence of any handwriting expert worth?

The *Evening Standard* for July 15th 1926 reported Mr. Justice Swift as having said in a case which he tried on that day:

"There are no experts on handwriting, although I know some people who come here and claim to be handwriting experts."

The worthlessness of such 'expert' evidence has often been shown in legal cases, as well as the conflicts of opinion between the 'experts' themselves. As regards Mr. Netherclift's expertness, we find that Mr. Montague Williams, Q.C., says in his book: *Leaves of a Life* (Vol. II, p. 134), "I never was much of a believer in experts in handwriting. I have examined, and more frequently cross-examined, Chabot, Netherclift, and all the experts of the day, and have nearly always caught them tripping. In fact, in my opinion they are utterly unreliable."

As against Mr. Netherclift, however, we may place the opinion of Herr Ernst Schütze, Caligraphist to the Court of the Emperor

of Germany. Some specimens of Mme. Blavatsky's handwriting, together with some letters from the Mahatmas, were submitted to him by Mr. G. Gebhard. Herr Schütze's opinion was in each and every case that there was "not the remotest similarity".¹

Mr. J. D. B. Gribble was the 'expert' who examined the Blavatsky-Coulomb letters on behalf of the Missionaries, and gave it as his opinion that they were written by Mme. Blavatsky. But when he came to examine the 'K. H.' letters he gave it as his opinion that there was no resemblance. In his *Report of an Examination*, etc., p. 28, he says :

"On the 3rd of October I again went to Adyar, accompanied by a native gentleman. I explained that all that I was concerned in was the genuineness of the letters, and I asked if I could be shown some other Mahatma messages. Several were shown to me, some purporting to have been written by Koot Hoomi, some by another Mahatma, and others by a Chela. I certainly saw three different handwritings, and I am bound to say that in none of these did I notice any of the peculiar characteristics I have mentioned in the report. Koot Hoomi's handwriting is very peculiar, upright and somewhat round. It is not a running hand."

Any one can now examine this handwriting of K. H. in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, published in 1923, where a facsimile is given. The internal evidence in this inestimable volume is sufficient to show, without any disputable handwriting evidence, that they could not have been written by Mme. Blavatsky, though even in this matter there will doubtless be sceptics who wish to think, and therefore will think, the contrary.

It might be as well to conclude this criticism as to the value of the Blavatsky-Coulomb letters with the following letter from Mr. A. O. Hume, C.B., published in the *Calcutta Statesman* at the time of the 'exposure'. Mr. Hume was a high government official in India, and had been in the first instance deeply interested in the Theosophical teachings. He had witnessed several of the phenomena described in Mr. Sinnett's *Occult World*, and is repeatedly mentioned as an arch-sceptic in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*.

The following is his letter :

"Sir,—I have seen an article in the *Times of India*, referring to certain letters alleged to have been written by Mme. Blavatsky to Mme. Coulomb, and your brief notice of the same. I desire to warn your readers and the public generally against accepting these supposed

¹ See A. P. Sinnett's *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, Appendix.

letters as altogether genuine. I can do this with the better grace that all connexion between myself, Mme. Blavatsky, Col. Olcott, Mr. Damodar, has long since ceased. I was unable to approve of many things in the conduct of the Society and its Journal, and hence, though still warmly sympathizing in its avowed objects, I have, for the last two years or more, been only a nominal member of the Theosophical Society. It is wholly without bias therefore that I advise all persons interested in the question to suspend their judgments as to the authenticity of these supposed letters. I will not now raise the question as to whether Mme. Blavatsky is capable of participating in foolish frauds, such as these letters would make her appear to have directed. All I desire to point out is this : *Mme. Blavatsky is no fool* ; on the contrary, as all who know her, be they friends or foes, will admit, she is an exceptionally clever and far-sighted woman, with a remarkably keen perception of character. Would such a woman ever give a person like Mme. Coulomb the entire power over her future that the writing of such letters involves ? Or, again, say she *had*, in some mad mood, written such letters, would she have come to an open rupture with the holder of them ? Parts of the letters may be genuine enough ; one passage cited has a meaning quite different from that in which the *Times of India* accepts it, and, believe me, Mme. Blavatsky is far too shrewd a woman to have ever *written* to any one anything that could convict her of fraud."

ALLAN HUME

Mr. Hodgson says on p. 274 of his Report that : " Latterly, and partly in consequence of the evidence I was able to lay before him (Mr. Hume), he came to the conviction that the letters in question were actually written by Mme. Blavatsky."

On p. 275, however, he says : " Mr. Hume's position at present is that, despite all the frauds perpetrated, there have been genuine phenomena, and that, though of a low order, Mme. Blavatsky really had and has Occultists of considerable though limited powers behind her ; that K. H. is a real entity, but by no means the powerful and godlike being he has been painted, and that he has had some share, directly or indirectly—though what Mr. Hume does not pretend to say—in the production of the K. H. Letters."

P. Fortunately we have now in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* a means of forming a more correct estimate of the personality, powers, and claims of ' K. H.' than was the case at that time.

According to the editor of *The Christian College Magazine* (October 1884) Mme. Coulomb did not communicate with him until the 9th August ; so that it would appear that it took her from the 18th May, when she was dismissed, to that date to

prepare her forged documents. Is it likely that she would have wasted all that time if the documents had been genuine and already to her hand ?

The editor's statement is somewhat disingenuous. It does not preclude Mme. Coulomb's previous negotiations with the *padris*, which she had certainly had. The editor does not deny this ; he merely says : " It is probable that, had there been any previous negotiations between Mme Coulomb and the *padris*, such as the Mahatma mentions, we should have heard of it."

But, in any case, why did Mme. Coulomb lose nearly three months before exploding her 'exposure' ?

Summing up the evidence as to the genuineness of these alleged Blavatsky-Coulomb letters we must say that on the following grounds we must conclude not merely that there is no proof of their being genuine, but that the weight of evidence goes to show that they were clever forgeries in which scraps of actual letters had been incorporated with spurious and compromising material :

- (1) There is no evidence apart from that of the handwriting ' experts ' that the letters were genuine.
- (2) Handwriting ' expert ' evidence is valueless.
- (3) Mme. Coulomb is known to have been collecting for some years every scrap of stray writing or letters that she could get hold of.
- (4) M. Coulomb's handwriting is said to have been very like that of Mme. Blavatsky.
- (5) Mr. Hodgson does not give any facsimile reproductions of the letters in question.
- (6) The Coulombs were known to have been very shady characters, and to have been desirous of revenging themselves for their dismissal.
- (7) Mme. Coulomb's letters to Mme. Blavatsky do not substantiate the forged letters.
- (8) Mme. Blavatsky as " an exceedingly clever fraud " would never have placed herself in the hands of the Coulombs as these letters represent.
- (9) The Coulombs did not produce the letters till nearly three months after they left head-quarters.
- (10) The letters were never submitted to the defence for examination.

This last fact would, apart from anything else, necessitate our rejection of the whole case as put forward by the S.P.R.

M. SOLOVYOFF AND 'A MODERN PRIESTESS OF ISIS'

As I have already mentioned (p. 6) the S.P.R. adopted this book of M. Solovyoff as being confirmatory evidence supporting the conclusions of their former Report ten years previously.

Why they should have done this unless they felt the weakness of that Report is not at all evident; indeed, they must assuredly have been lost to all sense of proportion—one might even say, to all sense of decency—to have sponsored a book like Solovyoff's, which not merely deals with the phenomena, and with M. Solovyoff's own personal relations with Mme. Blavatsky in the dishonest manner which I shall now indicate, but which also gives the most ludicrous caricatures of the personality of Mme. Blavatsky, Col. Olcott, and other theosophical personages. In these representations he gives details which are not merely intended as caricatures to give a journalistic spice to his work in order to catch the popular fancy and make it a saleable work, but he further descends to vulgar insinuations about Mme. Blavatsky of the vilest kind. He could of course rely upon the general ignorance of the Russian public, when the book was published in the first instance; but it is a book which the Committee of the S.P.R. certainly *ought* at that time to have recognized as a worthless melodramatic presentation, calculated merely to tickle the popular imagination and ignorant prejudice. They ought also to have recognized that the book was written for the express purpose of discrediting and slandering Mme. Blavatsky *after she was dead* by a man who was her bitterest enemy. It is but one more instance of their own willingness to strike by any means.

Now let us see what the book is worth.

We find (p. 97) that in October or November 1884 M. Solovyoff had already determined that:

"Whatever came I would collect such proofs of all these deceptions as should be sufficient not only for me but for all these blind dupes (theosophists in Paris). I would no longer give way to the involuntary sympathy and pity, which, in spite of everything, still attracted me to Helena Petrovna. I would in the first place deal only with Mme. Blavatsky the thief of souls, who was trying to steal my soul too."

He then shamelessly confesses that in order that Mme. Blavatsky should have no suspicion that he was trying to ruin

her, he would still pose as her friend. The sentence which I have quoted above we shall find, however, to be merely a blind to cover up the undoubted fact that at the time to which it refers he was an ardent believer. Now let us see.

Some six months afterwards (June 12th 1885) he wrote the following letter :¹

"DEAR HELENA PETROVNA,

"The last two weeks have not passed in vain. Crookes and Simeon have been here. I have made their acquaintance; but the thing is that all is now arranged and prepared to overwhelm, here at least—that is in the Paris press—all this rabble of Coulombs and all the asses, to what learned society soever they may belong, who could for a moment pay attention to her abominable pamphlet. The pamphlet has produced universal indignation here, and I have not even had to defend you to anybody—so that after all this dirty intrigue, they have only increased the sympathy felt for you. . . . Ah, if I could only see you."

Your sincerely devoted and affectionate

Vs. SOLOVYOFF

It will be seen that this letter has a direct reference to the Coulomb scandal. Taken in conjunction with the following letter it is impossible to credit that it was otherwise than a genuine expression of opinion at the time it was written. The following was written still later (October 8th 1885) (p. 288):

"DEAR HELENA PETROVNA,

"Which is the better, to write at random, or to hold one's tongue and work for the good of one's correspondent? . . . I have made friends with Mme. Adam, and talked a great deal to her about you; I have greatly interested her, and she has told me that her *Revue* is open not only to theosophy but to a defence of yourself personally if necessary. I praised up Mme. de Morsier to her, and at the same time there was another gentleman there who spoke on your behalf in the same tone, and Mme. Adam wished to make acquaintance with Mme. de Morsier, who will remain in Paris as the official means of communication between me and the *Nouvelle Revue*. Yesterday the meeting of the two ladies took place; our Emilie was quite in raptures. . . . In any case this is very good. To-day I passed the morning with Richet, and again talked a great deal about you, in connexion with Myers and the Psychical Society. I can say positively that I convinced Richet of the reality of your personal power and of the phenomena which proceed from you. He put me three questions categorically. To the first two I answered affirmatively; with respect to the third I said that I should be in a position to answer affirmatively

¹ See Appendix A in his book as translated for the S.P.R. by Mr. Walter Leaf, this Appendix being abstracts from a Pamphlet published by Mme. Blavatsky's sister, Mme. Jelihovsky, in reply to Solovyoff's book.

without any trouble, in two or three months. But I do not doubt that I shall answer affirmatively, and then, you will see ! there will be such a triumph that all the psychists will be wiped out. . . . Yes so it will be ; for you did not treat me as a doll ? . . . I start the day after to-morrow for St. Petersburg. . . . What will happen ? ”

Yours cordially devoted

VS. SOLOVYOFF

Even Mr. Leaf has to admit with reference to this letter that : “ This does, so far as I can judge, imply a real inconsistency in M. Solovyoff’s narrative.” There are numerous other ‘ inconsistencies ’ which can be pointed out, but I think that these will suffice here.

With regard to the phenomena, however, there are two respecting which M. Solovyoff published accounts which show that he accepted their genuineness at the time that they took place, but which he afterwards attempts to explain away. In *Light*, July 1884, there was published an account of a remarkable clairvoyant feat by Mme. Blavatsky which was witnessed and attested by six witnesses, M. Solovyoff being one of them. Solovyoff afterwards sent an account to the Russian journal *Rebus*. He finishes his account with the following words :

“ The circumstances under which the phenomenon occurred in its smallest details, carefully checked by myself, do not leave in me the smallest doubt as to its *genuineness* and reality. Deception or fraud in this particular case *are entirely out of the question* ” (see Sinnett, *Incidents*, p. 273).

The second case was one in which one of the Masters appeared to him astrally during the night at a hotel in Elberfeld when he was on a visit to H. P. B. Notwithstanding that Mme. Blavatsky told him the next morning that the Master had been to see him, he endeavours in his book to make out that the whole matter was an hallucination or a dream. The original account appears in full in the S.P.R. Report (p. 393) ; and it is most certainly that of a man who at the time fully believed in the genuineness of the visitation. Mrs. Sidgwick in commenting upon it on behalf of the S.P.R., rejects the theory of hallucination, and accepts that of dream, and afterwards naïvely remarks : “ Since writing the above I have learnt that, *owing to events which have since occurred*, M. Solovyoff no longer regards his experience as affording evidence of occult agency ” (*Italics mine*). In other words : if you have afterwards decided that a man is a liar, you must reject every previous incident in which he told you the truth !

So much for the value of M. Solovyoff’s work. I have only

dealt with a very small portion of it as bearing directly upon the S.P.R. Report. To illustrate fully its untruthful and scandalous nature would require numerous extracts which cannot be given here.

Mme. Elévatsky's own attitude towards M. Solovyoff may be very briefly illustrated by two short extracts from letters written by her to members of her own family.

In 1884 she wrote to her aunt, Mme. Fadéef :

"It's not long since I have come to London, but I have already got two such pitiful letters. The only thing he (Solovyoff) asks of me is to care for him and not forget him. He says he has never loved any one outside of his family as he loves poor old me " (*The Path*, New York, Vol. X, p. 76).

In 1885 she wrote to her sister, Mme. Jelihovsky :

"I am travelling with him (Solovyoff) in Switzerland. I really cannot understand what makes him so attached to me. As a matter of fact I cannot help him in the least. I can hardly help him to realize any of his hopes. Poor man, I am so sorry for him " (*Ibid.*, p. 108).

The real fact was that Solovyoff was of a neurotic, unbalanced and somewhat psychic nature ; that he became violently imbued in the first instance with the idea of becoming a *chela*, and of thereby acquiring occult knowledge and phenomenal powers ; that Mme. Elévatsky recognized his utter unfitness to take even the first steps in Occultism, but that nevertheless she gave him his chance, though she refused him the direct communications which he so eagerly desired. The result was inevitable, for it is an occult law which operates in all cases, of those who contact these occult forces, that the inner nature of the man comes violently to the surface, whether for good or for evil. In Solovyoff's case—as in others which could be given—it was the evil which predominated, and the result is seen in his repudiation of all that he once accepted, and his bitter attack on the woman who had endeavoured to save him from himself.

But what of the S.P.R. who fathered the English translation of this obviously venomous attack on a woman whose work becomes more and more appreciated as time goes on, and in which the author stands self-condemned as a liar ? Mr. H. Sidgwick, who writes the Preface on behalf of the S.P.R., says that :

"Such English readers as were likely to be interested in learning anything more about Mme. Elévatsky would not so much desire additional proof that she was a charlatan—a question already judged and decided—but rather some explanation of the remarkable success of her imposture."

This 'explanation' he finds in "Mr. Solovyoff's entertaining narrative".

"Entertaining"—yes. That is precisely what it was intended to be for those whose appreciation of the *entertaining* nature of a book increases in proportion as it is scandalous. But we should not have expected to find the learned members of the S.P.R. Committee in this category. It is simply amazing that any one with a reputation to lose should have lent their approval to a work of this nature; more particularly because its author waited till Mme. Blavatsky was dead before launching his attack.

In the recent case of Capt. Peter Wright v. Viscount Gladstone, Mr. Justice Avory said in his summing up:

"Lord Gladstone used the word 'coward'. The jury should ask themselves, 'Is not the man who slanders the dead a "coward"?' What is the difference between stabbing a man in the back—which is what a coward would do—and slandering a dead man in a way which it must be known would bring the greatest pain upon his descendants, knowing it would be almost impossible technically to disprove the charge."

That is practically the position in which the S.P.R. Council put themselves by fathering M. Solovyoff's scandalous book. And their plea for this publicity is that the book is 'entertaining'!

Mr. Sidgwick in his apology for thus publishing the book does not venture to guess "whether the Theosophical Society will last much longer". He evidently thinks that it will not. But at all events we can say to-day, that subsequent history has given the lie as to either this book having 'explained' the "remarkable success of Mme. Blavatsky's imposture"—i.e., Theosophy in all its aspects as she presented it to the world—or the S.P.R. Report as having "judged and decided" that she was a charlatan.

So intent have these learned fraud-hunters been to prove that Mme. Blavatsky's phenomenal powers could not be credited because they were altogether outside the range of their own experience at that time, that they have entirely overlooked the fact that the 'explanation' lay in the nature of the teachings, and not at all in the personality of the teacher.

It will readily be seen, indeed, that the blind confidence and conceit of these Psychical Researchers in their own judgments is almost pathetic; for they do not even hesitate to publish facts which flatly contradict their own conclusions, since they have 'no difficulty' in explaining away these facts as being either 'hallucinations', or 'impersonations', or—as a last resource—'dreams'.

THE REPORT : CONCLUSIONS

I must now deal with the Conclusions put forward by the Committee of the S.P.R. These Conclusions involve the following questions :

(1) The question of fraud on the part of Mme. Blavatsky and others in the case of the particular phenomena dealt with in the Report.

With regard to this I may remark in the first place that every one is entitled to form his own opinion on the basis of the Report *provided they have genuinely studied and analysed that Report*, and have also made themselves acquainted with the evidence on the other side. How many who have so glibly quoted the conclusions of the Report have ever done this ?

In the second place I would remark, that the conclusion that "no genuine psychical phenomena whatever will be found among the pseudo-mysteries of the Russian lady" (p. 317), is one which not merely goes far beyond the scope of the Report itself, but is absolutely negatived by innumerable witnesses of phenomena with which the Report does not deal at all. This, however, is Mr. Hodgson's personal statement. The Committee themselves are more guarded in their conclusions. They say (p. 205) "as to the correctness of Mr. Hodgson's explanation of particular marvels" they (the Committee) "do not feel called upon to express any definite conclusion". Really ! But if Mr. Hodgson's 'explanations' cannot be definitely accepted, how on earth can the Committee pronounce any judgment at all—much less the sweeping condemnation of Mme. Blavatsky to which they have committed themselves ?

The answer to this question is to be found in the fact that the case was so absolutely prejudged that the Committee are blind to the incongruities of their own statements.

(2) The question as to the existence or non-existence of the Masters or Mahatmas.

In respect of this the Committee say (p. 204) "There is consequently a very strong presumption that all the marvellous narratives put forward as evidence of the existence and occult power of the Mahatmas are to be explained as due either (a) to deliberate deception carried out by or at the instigation of Mme.

Blavatsky, or (b) to spontaneous illusion, or hallucination, or unconscious misrepresentation or invention on the part of the witnesses."

Here again I must remark that 'presumption' is not *proof*, and that when the Committee say "*all* the marvellous narratives", they go far beyond the scope of the Report. As a matter of fact *all* the narratives are not marvellous in any sense of the term; many are simple matter-of-fact meetings with the Mahatmas in the flesh. But then of course this can always be 'easily' explained away on the theory of a confederate.

The Report itself mentions one such narrative, that of Mr. Ramaswamier (p. 359), who recounts how he set out from Darjeeling to cross the frontier into Tibet in order "to find the Mahatmas—or DIE". When he had come into Sikkhim he was met by a solitary horseman, whom he immediately recognized as the Mahatma 'M', and with whom he then had a long talk.

As this meeting with the Mahatma could not be attributed to a 'dream'—it was between 8 and 9 a.m.—Mr. Hodgson can see "*no improbability in supposing* that the Mahatma was personated by one of Mme. Blavatsky's confederates". Really and truly, will not these fraud-hunters "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel". We may say here, indeed, that we could perhaps find no better example of the saying that 'extremes meet'. The extreme of incredulity in this case is simply the extreme of credulity; for they "*see no improbability in supposing*"—anything rather than the straightforward narrative, which clearly shows in this case that impersonation was out of the question.

But how in any case can the S.P.R. *disprove* the existence of the Masters, Adepts, or Mahatmas? The existence of Adepts and Initiates has been a matter well known to special students all through the ages, not merely in the East but also in the West. On the general principle of evolution we are bound to accept of their existence, even if we do not accept the evidence for the existence of the particular ones with whom Mme. Blavatsky worked. This, indeed, was the way in which Mme. Blavatsky represented the matter to me. She never asked me, nor any one else so far as I am aware, to set aside our personal doubts in the matter so far as one's own experience might not have confirmed that of others; much less did she—in Mr. Hodgson's words—ask any one to render "a profound obedience to the behests of imaginary Mahatmas".

Mme. Blavatsky only brought to the notice of the world in general the existence of a trans-Himalayan Centre; but the

reception by the world in general of that information was not such as to encourage any other of the numerous Centres in other parts of the world to authorize a similar disclosure.

On this point I might refer my readers to the evidence of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743-1803). What he says is so applicable both to Mme. Blavatsky herself and to *The Secret Doctrine* which she wrote, that I may be excused from quoting it here. It is to be found in Mr. A. E. Waite's work on "The Unknown Philosopher" (p. 82) : ¹

"For such an enterprise as that which I have undertaken more than common resources are necessary. Without specifying those which I employ, it will be enough to say that they connect with the essential nature of man, that they have always been known to some among mankind from the prime beginning of things, and that they will never be withdrawn wholly from the earth while thinking beings exist thereon. Thence have I derived my evidence, and thence my conviction upon truths the search after which engrosses the entire universe. After this avowal, if I am accused of disseminating an unknown doctrine, at least I must not be suspected of being its inventor, for if it connect with the nature of man, not only am I not its inventor, but it would have been impossible for me to establish any other on a solid basis. The principles here expounded are the true key to all the allegories and all the mysterious fables of every people, the primitive source of every kind of institution, and actually the pattern of those laws which direct and govern the universe, constituting all beings. In other words, they serve as a foundation to all that exists and to all that operates, whether in man and by the hand of man, whether outside man and independently of his will. Hence, in the absence of these principles there can be no real science, and it is by reason of having forgotten these principles that the earth has been given over to errors. But although the light is intended for all eyes, it is certain that all eyes are not so constituted as to be able to behold it in its splendour. It is for this reason that the small number of men who are depositaries of the truths which I proclaim are pledged to prudence and discretion by the most formal engagements."

Mme. Blavatsky was the chosen agent during the last quarter of the nineteenth century by one particular Centre of "the small number of men who are depositaries of the truths" thus connected "with the essential nature of man"; and her phenomena merely disclosed a very small portion of that *essential nature*. The sequel showed very plainly that "it is certain that all eyes are not so constituted as to be able to behold it in its splendour".

¹ It is taken from *Des Erreurs et de la Verite*, Part I, pp. 5, 6, 7, 8, 10. Edition of 1882.

Nevertheless, thousands did at least discern that the light was there, and set about the work of training themselves to perceive it more clearly. Hence the success of the Theosophical Movement inaugurated by Mme. Blavatsky, but by no means dependent upon her personality, admittedly defective in many respects for the work entrusted to her. On p. 263 of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Mahatma 'M' says :

"One or two of us hoped that the world had so far advanced intellectually, if not intuitionally, that the occult doctrine might gain an intellectual acceptance, and the impulse given for a new cycle of occult research. Others—wiser as it would now seem—held differently, but consent was given for the trial. . . . In casting about we found in America a man to stand as leader—a man of great moral courage, unselfish, and having other good qualities. He was far from being the best, but (as Mr. Hume speaks in H. P. B.'s case), he was the best one available. With him we associated a woman of most exceptional and wonderful endowments. Combined with them she had strong personal defects, but just as she was, there was no second to her living fit for this work. We sent her to America, brought them together—and the trial began. From the first both she and he were given clearly to understand that the issue lay entirely with themselves."

For those who deny the existence of this higher knowledge—well : who can open the eyes of those who do not wish to see ?

(3) The question as to whether the letters which Mme. Blavatsky asserted came from the Mahatmas did so in reality, or whether they were her own production.

It is not of so much importance here to deal with the comparatively trivial messages with which the Report is principally concerned, as with the mass of correspondence which Mr. Sinnett obtained, and on the basis of which he wrote *Esoteric Buddhism*. We are to-day fortunately in a much better position to form an opinion on this matter since the publication in 1923 of a Volume of these letters which were found among Mr. Sinnett's papers after his death, and from which the above abstract is taken. There are 129 letters in all. There is nothing to show how these were individually received, but there is a very great deal in them bearing upon the occult means of their production and delivery. This is too large a question to enter into here, and the reader must be referred to the letters themselves. A good deal of light will thereby be thrown upon the handwriting question.

But the real crux of the whole matter rests upon the internal evidence of the Letters. Are they of such a nature that Mme. Blavatsky could not possibly have been their author ? To this

question I must answer, that I do not see how any one with any knowledge of the circumstances in general, or of Mme. Blavatsky's characteristics and resources, can possibly think that she could have written them herself, consciously, 'out of her own head'. There may of course be exceptions in some of the Letters; but in the great bulk of them the internal evidence is of such a nature that it is impossible for me to think that Mme. Blavatsky could have been their original author.

There will doubtless be some sceptics who will boggle even at that. It is not a matter that can easily be proved; or perhaps it cannot be proved at all. Every one must form their own judgment. Here again, however, I must point out that whether Mme. Blavatsky did or did not write them wholly and fully and consciously, it is the *teachings* which they contain, the information itself, the philosophy, the cosmology, the anthropology, and the occult PATH of initiation therein set forth, which gives the value to these *Letters*—let their immediate source be what it may.

The *Letters* make no claim to be infallible. The circumstances under which many of them were dictated and transmitted make mistakes and errors almost inevitable, and doubtless any critic who wishes to disparage will find many points on which he can lay his hand. Moreover—as the Letters themselves state over and over again—the *whole teaching* cannot be given out, and many of the statements are deliberate 'blinds', concealing, and yet disclosing to the initiated, the inner truth.

These *Letters* are in fact a magnificent addition to our information respecting the fundamental principles and teachings of Theosophy as set forth in the literature which H. P. Blavatsky gave to the world. If these teachings are inherently sound, no attacks on the character of the teacher can make them otherwise. An acknowledgment of them in academic literature and circles can hardly be expected as yet; but any one who is acquainted with the change which is taking place even in the most conservative 'seats of learning' cannot fail to recognize that the new principles in science and philosophy are coming nearer and nearer with each re-adjustment to those laid down in *The Secret Doctrine*. In religion, the fundamental teaching of Theosophy is THE DIVINE NATURE OF MAN; or, in the words of the *Upanishads*, THAT ART THOU. To what extent Christian theology is approximating to that is too large a question to enter into here.

(4) Finally, Mr. Hodgson finds himself confronted with the question as to Mme. Blavatsky's *motive* for spending "so many laborious days in such a fantastic work of imposture" (p. 313).

Well, as Theosophy is *not* "a fantastic work of imposture", the problem is of his own making. However, let us see what is his solution.

He rejects in turn the hypotheses of "religious mania", of "the sordid motive of pecuniary gain", and of "a morbid yearning for notoriety". Well, we must be thankful at all events that he has granted so much. But what remains? The greatest Mare's Nest of the whole of this wonderful Report: the theory that it was all done—*because she was a Russian spy!*

How or in what manner the phenomena which he has dealt with could further her plans in this respect he does not attempt to show; but perhaps it may be sufficient here to set one detractor against the other. M. Solovyoff deals very drastically with this wonderful discovery of Mr. Hodgson. On p. 114 of his book he says:

"This (spy theory) he had to prove, and to prove exactly as he proved her fraudulent phenomena and all her other deceptions: yet he has no evidence of any sort, for it is impossible to regard as evidence the fragments he quotes from her writings, from which no serious man could draw a conclusion of the sort. . . . H. P. Blavatsky was not a spy."

Having thus so kindly cut the ground from beneath Hodgson's feet, he proceeds to do the same with regard to the finding of the Committee that Col. Olcott was not a party to Mme. Blavatsky's 'fraudulent phenomena'; but with that I need not deal.

Perhaps the one thing which somewhat redeems the character of the S.P.R. Committee is that they *did* exonerate Col. Olcott from any complicity in fraudulent representations or phenomena.

Thus Mr. Hodgson is left entirely 'in the air' as to any motive for this elaborate structure of fraud which he had endeavoured to erect with so many hypotheses as to what *might have been* the case.

However, with M. Solovyoff's testimony to the value of Mr. Hodgson's judicial faculty and reasoning powers I shall be content to conclude this survey and criticism of THE GREAT MARE'S NEST of the Report of the Society for Psychical Research in their attempt "to investigate the phenomena connected with the Theosophical Society".

Ex nihilo nihil fit.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have shown that the Committee of the S.P.R. "appointed to investigate the Phenomena connected with the Theosophical Society", never investigated the phenomena at all. That, moreover, they practically left the investigation of the *evidence* for the phenomena in the hands of one man, whose qualifications as Counsel for the prosecution may perhaps be admitted, but who otherwise showed himself to be utterly incompetent not merely to understand the nature of the phenomena and the psychological problem involved in the personality of Mme. Blavatsky, but also utterly lacking in any judicial faculty, and even in the power to form rational conclusions from the evidence before him.

I have shown further that the Committee actually, with the most indecent haste, adopted and promulgated Mr. Hodgson's conclusions before even his Report was completed; and that they not merely withheld from the defence the incriminating Blavatsky-Coulomb forged letters, but closed the case altogether on the basis of Mr. Hodgson's incomplete Report, and stigmatized the defendant as a fraud and a charlatan without giving her, or any one on her behalf, a chance of analysing the evidence put forward in the Report, and replying thereto.

I have shown also that ten years after the Report was printed in their *Proceedings*, the Society gave their *imprimatur* to an "entertaining" but scandalous and obviously untruthful book which was a further slander on a dead woman, who by that time at least might have been recognized as the pioneer of a great spiritual movement; whose literary work had been largely increased and widely acknowledged; and with whose teachings every advance in science, in philosophy, in archaeology, and anthropology is seen to come more and more into line.

One cannot, then, but speculate as to what would have been the result if the S.P.R., instead of thus rejecting and stigmatizing on the most superficial grounds the wholly exceptional phenomena presented to them, had treated the matter sympathetically—albeit with every natural reservation of judgment—and had bestowed upon it the same amount of patient care and investigation which they afterwards bestowed upon certain mediums—Eusapia Palladino, for example. The haste with which they published their conclusions, indeed, shows quite clearly that the

whole matter was prejudged. They had not the wit to see that even supposing fraud to have been proved in some cases, that only added to the interest of the problem as to how Mme. Blavatsky the 'fraud' could be the same *person* as 'H. P. B.', the pioneer of a great spiritual movement. At the very least it presented a psychological problem of the greatest possible interest: a problem of double personality if of nothing else. They had themselves absolved Mme. Blavatsky from all worldly motives of pecuniary benefit or even of notoriety; and Hodgson could only evolve out of his imagination a ridiculous 'Russian Spy' theory to account for all her laborious years of sacrifice.

If, then, they had treated the matter sympathetically, and had taken the testimony of Col. Olcott and others as to how *Isis Unveiled* was written (see *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I, pp. 202 ff.); if instead of seeking for a 'fraud' they had recognized the spiritual nature of Mme. Blavatsky's work, and had sought for the source of her inspiration; if, indeed, they had merely taken her as an interesting *psychological* problem of an altogether exceptional nature; they might have discovered that the investigation led them to a rich mine of information which would have advanced the science of psychology by many decades, and would have thrown a vivid light on the problems of human personality in many of their phases both ordinary and extraordinary—from a normal point of view—not to mention higher possibilities of development and evolution which are known only to those who, having recognized these possibilities, have not turned away from the evidence offered, or the method of obtaining confirmatory proof in their own personal experience.

Eighteen years afterwards, Mr. F. W. H. Myers, one of the great Committee responsible for the S.P.R. Report, published his voluminous work, *The Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*. That work itself can be said to contain much and which, had Mr. Myers been acquainted with it at the time of the Report, would certainly have led him to take a greater interest in, and altogether a different view of, the personality of Mme. Blavatsky. But what would the book itself have been if Mr. Myers had devoted to her the same amount of patient investigation and reservation of conclusions which he has given to other much less significant cases, even after fraud had been admitted as part of the problem?

Well: when all is said and done, what happens is always for the best. Perhaps we may be allowed, therefore, to make here some conjectures of our own as to why this thing happened as

it did. In the first place, perhaps the world was not ready for the *official* recognition which might have resulted from the more sympathetic treatment which I have mentioned. Perhaps the world is not ready even yet. Perhaps the very fact of the S.P.R. Report being so adverse was part of a larger necessity, guarding against the premature disclosure of matters which humanity as a whole was then, and is as yet, unfitted to receive.

Plotinus tells us: "This, therefore, is manifested by the mandate of the mysteries, which orders that they shall not be divulged to those who are uninitiated. For as that which is divine cannot be unfolded to the multitude this mandate forbids the attempt to elucidate it to any one but him who is fortunately able to perceive it" (Enn. VI, 9, 11). There is plenty of evidence to show that the same 'mandate' is in force to-day. I have quoted on p. 52 the testimony of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin to the same effect. The *Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* are full of the same warnings.

Physical science to-day recognizes itself as being on the borderland of a revolutionary discovery as to the nature of inter-atomic energy; the discovery of a reservoir of energy of such a tremendous nature that when compared with it our present sources of energy are but playthings. Is humanity ready for that discovery? Most certainly not, for it would be immediately applied for destruction and war. But our modern scientists will never admit that there can be any Adepts in the world who know all about this inter-atomic energy, and who can use it for phenomena such as were some of those which Mme. Blavatsky exhibited, or that these Adepts have in fact penetrated far beyond the Ether of science into the arcane region of Primordial Substance, and the nature of the great World-process.

Well: so be it. God knows what would have happened if that knowledge had been indisputably demonstrated to the satisfaction of our learned Academies and Royal Societies. Perhaps, then, the S.P.R. Report served a useful and necessary purpose in holding back premature disclosures in this region of physics.

Psychical research similarly is just on the borderland of a tremendous discovery as to the inner nature and powers of what we know as *Mind*. Mind is not something which each individual possesses as a little bit of his own personality associated wholly with his thinking faculty and physical brain. Nothing can be manifested in the individual which is not *Cosmic* in its origin and nature, and Mind is a tremendous Cosmic Force, as well as a mode of Cosmic Substance, infinitely more potent than any mere

physical force. Here is a danger, therefore, which far outweighs even the possible discoveries of physical science. Already there is a sufficient danger in the promiscuous dabbling by ignorant and untrained investigators in so-called *spiritualistic* phenomena, and whilst hypnotism and psycho-analysis also lie on the borderland, and introduce elements of the most undesirable, not to say dangerous nature.

Here again the world is not ready ; and who shall say what might have been the result if the S.P.R. had taken up seriously the investigation of phenomena connected with the Theosophical Society".

Whilst, therefore, condemning the S.P.R. Committee for their hasty, prejudiced, unjudicial, and unjust condemnation of a pioneer in a region to which humanity as a whole must one day advance, but into which as yet only a few are advanced enough to enter, we must perhaps not regret on the whole that the S.P.R. Report served to turn aside from this deeper quest what we might call the orthodox or academic investigator ; and that in so doing it perhaps saved the world—for the time being at all events—from the appalling disasters which result, both to the individual and to the race, from the misuse of occult forces.

Already at that time Mr. Sinnett had done more than enough by the publication of his *Occult World* to arouse an unhealthy interest in phenomena, in *wonders* for their own sake ; for always and ever there are those who are seeking merely after signs and wonders. He himself was warned about this over and over again.

In a passage I have already quoted (p. 53) Mahatma ' M ' says :

" One or two of us hoped that the world had so far advanced intellectually, if not intuitionally, that the Occult doctrine might gain an intellectual acceptance, and the impulse given for a new cycle of occult research. Others—wiser as it would now seem—held differently."

That was written in 1882, three years before the S.P.R. ' investigations ' : so that even at that time it would appear that the effort had been pronounced a failure. The S.P.R. Report only came as the culmination and seal of this failure—a failure, as it may be noted, only so far as the world at large was concerned.

Perhaps H. P. B. had already exceeded the powers entrusted to her, and the S.P.R. Report was merely her Karma ; but if this was the case it was due to the persistent demands of A. P. Sinnett and others for test phenomena, which they foolishly thought would convince the scientific world and the public, despite

everything the Masters told them to the contrary. Perhaps Mme. Blavatsky, the 'shell' (see *Mahatma Letters*, p. 256) was actually made to appear as a fraud and a charlatan because "all this ought to have been limited to an inner and very SECRET circle" (see *Mahatma Letters*, p. 323). A careful study of *The Mahatma Letters* throws much light upon these inner matters which can only be hinted at here. But perhaps also, while Mme. Blavatsky, the outer personality, chafed and raged under the stigma placed upon her, the *real* H. P. B. regarded the whole matter with those calm, deep, far-seeing eyes which look out on us from her portraits as from a soul untouched by the passing shows and storms of this life : knowing that all that happens is in accordance with immutable LAW ; and knowing also that her (his) mission involved the crucifixion of the lower personality ; involved that to the undiscerning eyes of those who could see no deeper than the outer personality, that personality should even appear to be a fraud and a charlatan.

Even thus are the great secrets of Man's inner nature and powers guarded and protected from the unworthy seekers after signs and wonders, and from the premature discovery of those powers by such as would use them without any regard for moral and spiritual laws.

H. P. B. was a mirror, strongly and truly reflecting exactly what those who came to her were themselves in their own inner nature ; and what they sought for, that they found.

The S.P.R. sought only for a fraud—and so, inevitably, they found one—or rather *made* one. And though there are some to-day who would perpetuate this verdict, yet the world-wide influence of this great pioneer becomes more and more firmly established with every passing decade, as more and more it is recognized that the TEACHINGS to which she directed our attention "*connect with the essential nature of Man*"—and the UNIVERSE.